

Nuclear Proliferation Through Critical Security Studies

Written by Ben Willis

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BEN WILLIS, DEC 2 2013

“The whole situation seems so bizarre as to be beyond belief. On any given day, as we go about our business, the president is prepared to make a decision within 20 minutes that could launch one of the most devastating weapons in the world. To declare war requires an act of Congress, but to launch a nuclear holocaust requires 20 minutes’ deliberation by the president and his advisors.”

Robert S. McNamara (2005)

On 5 March 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) came into force, its preamble articulating international society’s fear not only of the devastation that could already be wrought upon mankind, but also the belief that further proliferation would seriously increase the dangers of nuclear war. However, despite the end of the Cold War and the consequent reduction in US-Soviet nuclear rivalry, the apparent threat from continued proliferation both within and outside the NPT framework – from states and non-state actors – remains a widely shared concern (ICNND, 2009: 3-10). Adopting a broadly ‘Welsh School’ Critical Security Studies (CSS) perspective, this paper seeks to provide a critique not so much of specific instances or trends in proliferation, but of the broader *ideas* underlying the notion that nuclear proliferation constitutes a major threat to international security. As such, it is divided into three main sections. The first problematizes the notion of international security itself via Ken Booth’s (2007) theory of world security, before briefly outlining the contemporary global proliferation environment. The second section then engages with the general debate between proliferation ‘optimists’ and ‘pessimists’, offering a critical analysis of both rationalist and constructivist contributions, and arguing from a world security perspective that proliferation unavoidably constitutes an inherent threat to human society. The third section then follows the CSS notion of praxis in applying the idea of security and emancipation as “two sides of the same coin” (Booth, 1991: 319): identifying one potential avenue for feasible change in the current world order, the paper envisions a possible route toward global nuclear abolition as providing a more desirable form of world security.

Security and Proliferation in the Contemporary Era

“The academic subject of security studies”, as Ken Booth argues, “is ultimately what we make it; it is the (temporary) historical outcome of the interplay between a socially constructed profession and the [...] individuals who are employed to profess it” (1997: 92). Hegemonic notions of international security advanced by realist theorists and practitioners since the birth of the discipline in the late 1940s – as predicated on statism, self-help, and survival – have of course been subject to particularly sustained challenge since the end of the Cold War (Buzan and Hansen, 2009: 187-225). Under the broad label of critical security studies, and encompassing such diverse approaches as Critical Theory, post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism, and various forms of constructivism, this project of widening and deepening the field can be seen to unite around three central themes (Browning and McDonald, 2011). The first is a rejection of the epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions of a positivist realism – whether classical or structural – that privileges the state as the necessary referent object, and military force as the relevant threat, in providing putatively objective social scientific analysis. The second and third themes that follow on from this – with theory being understood as “always for someone and for some purpose” (Cox, 1981: 128) – are concerns with what ‘security’ as discourse actually does, in both political and ethical terms. While various critical and – it should not be ignored – traditionalist approaches all have their benefits and drawbacks, this paper uses Booth’s narrower conception of CSS, often referred to as the Welsh School of security studies, as an alternative analytical

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framework. The advantage here – recognising that we as social beings help to constitute the interdependent fields of both theory and practice – is that it is not only analytically useful in its *deconstructive* aspect, but unlike other critical approaches it is also explicitly progressive and normatively attractive in its distinct *reconstructive* agenda.

Informed by Frankfurt School, Gramscian, Marxist, and Critical International Relations theorising, three core concepts animate CSS – those of security, emancipation, and community (Booth, 2007: 95-148). The concept of security itself is not seen as problematic – it being the absence of threats to a referent object – but the way in which it is contextualised within world politics is contested. Security *should* be seen as relative (both subjective and objective), instrumental (offering more than mere survival), politically powerful (in prioritising specific concerns), and derivative (originating from particular understandings of the character and purpose of politics). As such, the notion of ‘world security’ extends the range of referents beyond that of the state, and perceived threats beyond the purely military, than those typically associated with discourses of ‘international security’ – for whom achieving order and stability between states is what is usually conceived of as the most desirable outcome[1]. Following from Cox’s (1981) distinction between problem-solving and critical theory, CSS is thereby concerned not only with deficiencies *within* the status quo, but also those *of* the status quo – notably where the idealised sovereign Westphalian state and associated international system can “be seen as an important part of the problem of insecurity in world politics, not the solution” (Booth, 1997: 99).

With this comes a particular concern for those marginalised by traditionally dominant discourses. World security is fundamentally seen as a means toward the end that is emancipation for human society – progress toward a brighter future – that stands in contrast to those static and often fatalistic understandings, particularly associated with realism, of state-centric international anarchy as essentially unchanging and inherently conflictual (as Gramsci famously suggested, a pessimism of the intellect should nonetheless be accompanied by an optimism of the will). In seeing theory as praxis, the method of immanent critique is proffered as a means of analysing extant social reality from within its own standpoint, thereby “detecting the societal contradictions which offer the most determinate possibilities for emancipatory change” (Antonio, 1981: 332). Finally, a CSS approach also necessarily dictates an expansion of the notion of political community beyond that of the traditional communitarian Westphalian model, and toward a more heterogeneous and cosmopolitan understanding (Booth, 2007: 134-148). To borrow from Wendt (1992), anarchy is what states *and other actors* make of it.

What, then, is the current global order as it pertains to nuclear proliferation? The intersubjective construction of contemporary threats by various actors concerns both ‘vertical’ proliferation – the maintenance and expansion of nuclear arsenals by the original five NPT states (N-5) – and, more frequently, that of ‘horizontal’ proliferation – the spread of nuclear weapons beyond the N-5 to various states and non-state actors (ICNND, 2009: 11-47). While estimates vary on overall stockpiles due to lack of transparency, eight states were widely acknowledged to possess operational nuclear weapons as of January 2012, with uncertainty remaining over the status of North Korea’s nuclear capabilities (SIPRI, 2012: 14-15)[2]. Horizontal proliferation concerns incorporate so-called ‘first tier’ and ‘second tier’ proliferation: referring respectively to the sale or theft of necessary technologies and expertise from NWSs – or entities within them – to their non-nuclear equivalents, and to relevant trade between developing world states to bolster each other’s weapons capabilities (Braun & Chyba, 2004). More than thirty ‘latent’ states with indigenous civilian nuclear programmes also currently exist, many being able to cross the proliferation threshold in relatively short order (Montgomery and Sagan, 2009). Despite occasional active pursuit in recent years, primarily by al-Qa’eda and Aum Shinrikyo, and with much popular discourse surrounding the potential threat, non-state actors have yet to come close to acquiring any form of nuclear weapons – nor, according to Mueller (2009), is this realistically conceivable given the variety of substantial practical and organizational difficulties that are faced.

While various legal prohibitions exist concerning the use of chemical and biological weapons, there remains no specific convention outlawing the possession or use of nuclear weaponry (Anastassov, 2009). International society has instead constructed a non-proliferation regime consisting of a series of multilateral and bilateral initiatives, the centrepiece of which remains the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Currently entailing 190 state parties, the NPT rests on three inter-related pillars – non-proliferation, disarmament, and peaceful nuclear cooperation – and represented a ‘bargain’ in which non-nuclear states foreswore their own weapons development in return for a temporary grant of legal ownership to the N-5 alone, as well as the right to develop their own civilian nuclear

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programmes[3] (Thakur *et al.*, 2008). The continued pursuit and tolerance of nuclear weapons possession, alongside simultaneous attempts at non-proliferation and disarmament, therefore bespeaks of an ambiguity and lack of consensus within international society on the level of security – or insecurity – that they provide in the contemporary era. As Walker (2000) suggests, the original Cold War nuclear order was itself predicated on two somewhat antagonistic ‘systems’. On the one hand was a system of abstinence for non-nuclear states – in which nuclear weapons were understood as a source of insecurity, that is to say a threat – and on the other a system of deterrence for nuclear weapon states, in which by contrast they were represented as a source of security *against* threat. Deterrence being the central argument in favour of proliferation – suggesting nuclear weapons are conducive to the maintenance of international security – it is to this problematic concept and its related concerns that we therefore now turn.

Deterrence and Threat

As Knopf (2002) notes, while most public discourse assumes the further spread of nuclear weapons to be undesirable and destabilising, the field of security studies has always been much more ambivalent. Waltz (1981) provides the classic exposition of “proliferation optimism”, and is the starting point for any substantive critique of the threat that nuclear weapons may pose to international security. This argument essentially rests on the proposition that since through their sheer destructive power nuclear weapons are qualitatively different from conventional weapons, they ‘purify’ deterrent strategies and produce a system-pacifying effect – or ‘nuclear peace’ – that actually promotes interstate stability. Upturning Clausewitzian dictums and replacing a probability of victory or survivable defeat with one of potential (mutual) annihilation, the costs of conflict are such that state leaders will be deterred from engaging in war, both nuclear and conventional, against nuclear armed states (this includes allies sheltering under the nuclear umbrella of other states). Based in large part on the so-called ‘long peace’ between the two Cold War superpowers, Waltz (1990: 74) went so far as to declare that “the probability of major war among states having nuclear weapons approaches zero”. There are, however, numerous problems with this line of argument, not the least of which from a CSS perspective is the privileging of the Cold War as a time of bipolar stability given the rampant insecurity generated between and within states by superpower interventionism throughout the Third World during this period (Westad, 2007). This is of course entirely representative of the traditionalist view that equates international security with interstate – particularly Great Power – order and the absence of high-cost military conflict above all else. However, not only does Waltz believe that a ‘nuclear peace’ held during the Cold War, but that as the same logic remains it will continue to do so now in a more diffuse international order. A distinctly *laissez-faire* approach to further horizontal proliferation should therefore be welcomed[4]. Writing, for example, of the current Iranian nuclear programme and likely international responses, Waltz boldly states that “a nuclear-armed Iran [...] would probably be the best possible result: the one most likely to restore stability to the Middle East” (Waltz, 2012: 5).

In contrast to this, “proliferation pessimists” take a rather less sanguine view. As with his general theory of neorealism, Waltz’s system-level view of the pacifying effects of nuclear weapons fails to take into account crucial unit-level factors. Sagan’s seminal theoretical contribution to the pessimist argument does just this; rooted in organization theory, and drawing on a rather different historical reading of the USA, this argues that professional militaries are unlikely to fulfil the three core operational requirements dictated by Waltzian rational deterrence theory (RDT) owing to “common biases, inflexible routines, and parochial interests” (1994: 68). Absent the required level of informed civilian control of the military, new weapons states may fail to avoid undertaking inconclusive preventive war against potentially nuclearising rivals, may not develop the necessary invulnerable second-strike forces, nor ensure that their nuclear arsenals will not be prone to accidental or unauthorised use. As Sagan notes, “Waltz and other proliferation optimists have confused prescriptions of what rational states *should* do with predictions of what real states *will* do” (1994: 103). As such, the inherent instability of nuclear weapons possession constitutes a distinct source of threat. Of course, it may be that the views of Waltz and Sagan are actually complementary rather than mutually exclusive – proliferation potentially having both stabilising and destabilising effects dependent upon context. On a more empirical rather than theoretical level, however, other research from within a positivist-rationalist framework also calls into question the traditional state and military-centric security benefits of a nuclear peace. Sobek *et al.* (2012) suggest, for example, that a state’s risk of being attacked increases as it becomes closer to acquiring nuclear weapons, while post-acquisition still facing the same risk of attack as non-proliferators would. Horowitz (2009) finds that in the short term nuclear weapons states are more likely to reciprocate – and have

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reciprocated – militarized challenges by other states, while Rauchhaus (2009) suggests that although nuclear symmetry between states may lessen the chance of outright war (in contrast to nuclear asymmetry) it still increases the likelihood of crises, uses of force, and conflicts involving lower levels of fatalities. The point here is not that any such studies should be considered definitive, but that they indicate levels of uncertainty and risk – sources of insecurity – that clearly undermine the optimists' case.

Adopting a more constructivist perspective further complicates any claims to a nuclear peace. The apparent existence of a nuclear taboo (Tannenwald, 1999; 2005) may seem to may reinforce the argument held by optimists, as normative prohibitions restrain actors from actually using nuclear weapons – behaviour being guided by a logic of appropriateness as well as a logic of consequences. However, the problem remains that the potential exists for such a norm to be eroded, if indeed – as Paul (2010) suggests – it even has that powerful an effect at present. Similarly, if deterrence is actually an intersubjectively constituted 'game' (Lupovici, 2010) into which state elites are socialised, this also suggests that it may be one whose rules they can fail to learn correctly, whether as a result of system, unit, or individual level factors. The consequences of this are twofold. Firstly, that deterrence is actually a social construct and therefore amenable to change, and secondly that this change can be positive – toward the delegitimisation of nuclear deterrence as a security strategy – or indeed negative, leading to the failure of deterrence and the outbreak of major conflict through misunderstanding of the rules of the game. As such, the entire edifice of rational deterrence theory – and any supporting nuclear taboo – ultimately does little to transcend the security threat. The assumption of instrumentally rational actors is also problematic given the evidence from the psychological literature, where there remains no consensus on the general nature of human reasoning (Sturm, 2012). The so-called 'Rationality Wars' see one side arguing in favour an 'heuristics and biases' approach, suggesting that people often violate norms of rationality derived from formal logic, probability, and decision theory, and instead rely on heuristics (rules of thumb) that may work well within certain contexts but lead to distorting biases in others (Kahneman & Tversky, 1996). On the other side of the debate, the 'bounded rationality' approach suggests that people are largely rational, but within the context of both individual reasoning ability and the wider social environment (Gigerenzer, 1996). Neither, therefore, speaks well of the universalism and reliability inherent in the requirements of deterrence as political strategy[5].

This is, of course, not reason for engaging in any form of nuclear Orientalism and the imagining of an irrational Other, as Gusterson (1999) notes: the type of binary Western discourse which seeks to represent 'their' weapons as a threat in contrast to 'ours' which are not – something that was notably evident in Western reaction to the 1998 Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. The point is that, as Lebow and Stein (1989: 224) suggest, the seductive abstractions of proliferation optimism are actually "theories about non-existent decision-makers operating in non-existent environments". From a CSS perspective there is an inherent insecurity not only in the current nuclear order, but in any nuclear order – as long as weapons exist, there is the constant possibility not only that it does little to prevent international instability, non-state nuclear acquisition, or conventional military conflict, but also that wider deterrence will fail and nuclear conflict will occur. There are two further inter-related concerns here – one being that nuclear war may be a low probability event, but one of inordinately high impact, and the second being that these various concerns enter the realm of risk as much as that of threat. As a relatively underexplored concept in IR, risk can be considered in both an objective and an (inter)subjective sense, is normatively conditioned by particular actors, and only understood in the context of futuristic threat scenarios that may or may not occur (Clapton, 2011). While the elites of nuclear weapons states may therefore privilege possession as an acceptable risk in an Hobbesian international system, a world security perspective suggests otherwise. With particular regard to the consequences of nuclear warfare, as Toon et al. (2008:41) note, "a misperception that the nuclear winter idea has been discredited has permeated the nuclear policy community". Revisiting the hypothesis using modern climate models, however, recent findings suggest that even the regional use of nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan, for example, could lead to over 44 million direct and indirect deaths, producing global environmental change unprecedented in recorded human history and precipitating mass starvation (Toon et al., 2007; Robock, 2010). A nuclear exchange between the USA and Russia – and involving just one-fifth of their current arsenals – has been estimated to produce 770 million direct casualties, with indirect effects via ozone depletion and climate change eliminating the majority of the human population and reducing many of the remainder to a hunter-gatherer existence (Toon et al., 2008). This, surely, is an existential threat of the first order for world society, and it is one which – in both an objective and subjective sense – states in possession of nuclear weapons continuously hold over us all.

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Security and Emancipation

Attempting to reconstruct a new and far less threatening nuclear order, however, requires us to first understand why it is that states currently possess nuclear arsenals that expose both their own people and those beyond their borders to such constant danger. The arguments in favour of proliferation – whether horizontal or vertical – naturally tend to assume that security-seeking is the primary, if not exclusive, motivation of actors' behaviour. This is derived from the fundamental concept of the 'security dilemma', first theorised by John Herz (1950), in which a condition of unresolvable uncertainty exists between states under the condition of anarchy. The drivers of this uncertainty are both the ambiguous symbolism of weapons – the difficulty of distinguishing between their offensive and defensive nature – and the 'Other Minds Problem' of how to accurately perceive the present and future intentions of other actors (Booth and Wheeler, 2009: 1-18). In a sense, then, material proliferation is not actually the source of threat, it is the ideational aspect of the intentions behind proliferation – and others' *perceptions* of those intentions – that is ultimately what matters. Booth and Wheeler (2009) suggest that the meaning, significance, and implications of the security dilemma are organised around three ideal-type logical positions – those of the *fatalist*, for whom insecurity can never be escaped, the *mitigator*, which believes insecurity can be lessened but not escaped, and the *transcender*, where the emancipatory idea exists that human society can ultimately become whatever it chooses. The likes of Waltz and other realist-orientated security traditionalists obviously advocate proliferation – whether horizontal or vertical, managed or unlimited – as the answer to enduring insecurity. However, if as CSS argues we should see theory as being constitutive of reality and believe emancipatory change to be possible, then – while the security dilemma and the threats emanating from it may be a structural condition – there remains distinct scope for agency in mitigating and potentially transcending the security dilemma. The question is how one moves from a condition of fear, to one of achieving cooperation, and then finally of building trust; *this* is the underlying problematic of nuclear proliferation and disarmament.

It would be mistaken, however, to assume that security concerns are the only reason behind the decision to proliferate – and, more specifically, that purported security justifications are not inherently political and derived from particular agents' understandings of the purpose of nuclear security. Sagan's (1996) three explanatory models for the willingness of states to develop nuclear weapons is useful here, suggesting how more putatively objective national security concerns are not the only motivation. Factoring in domestic politics highlights how nuclear weapons can advance the parochial domestic and bureaucratic interests of particular sections of the state machinery, while recognition of international norms introduces the notion of 'nuclear symbolism'. Just as the nuclear taboo is constructed as a sign of appropriate behaviour at the system level, so the acquisition (or non-acquisition) of nuclear weapons can shape and reflect actors' identities. At this level of identity, they may even serve to reinforce what Mitzen (2006) refers to as a state's ontological security – its need for an Other against which to define itself, and its attendant desire for the 'certainty of uncertainty' that a perpetual security dilemma has to offer. In preferring a relationship of enmity, Mitzen notes, "ontological security can conflict with physical security. Even a harmful or self-defeating relationship can provide ontological security, which means states can become attached to conflict" (2006: 342). A prime example of these inter-related motivations is the case of overt Indian nuclearisation in 1998, where a combination of security concerns over China, domestic Indian coalition politics, arguments against international nuclear apartheid, and identity issues regarding Kashmir and Pakistan all contributed to the decision to proliferate (Singh, 1998; Chakma, 2005; Das, 2010). Resultant Pakistani nuclear testing, the Kargil War of 1999, and subsequent 2001-2 crisis, all provided immediate demonstration of the instability and insecurity perpetuated by and in spite of nuclearisation in South Asia[6]. Thus while the Indian state elite may have politicised nuclearisation as a means of ostensibly achieving a sense of national security, both the underlying motivations and resultant consequences have been rather different; the state being not so much a source of security but arguably one of greater insecurity for both its own citizens and those of the wider region.

How, then, are we to identify possibilities for feasible change in the existing order? A brief sketch of interrelated processes is all that can be provided here, drawing on existing conditions that offer emancipatory potential. Towards those motivated by a more fatalist understanding of anarchy, it is surely necessary to further delegitimise nuclear weapons through a new discourse of security, predicated both on their lack of utility and appropriateness in meeting the security threats facing states, their citizens, and the wider global community. The failures of deterrence and proliferation outlined above provide ample opportunity for various actors at the domestic and international level –

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such as with the recent US Nuclear Security Initiative – to pursue this line of argumentation. Furthermore, the oft-neglected existence of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZs) across most of the Southern hemisphere – themselves more expansive in scope than baseline NPT commitments – already speaks of how the majority of the members of international society have already reached this conclusion.

Those who see advantage in the mitigating of security dilemmas have the opportunity of re-invigorating the cooperative institutions of an existing multilateral non-proliferation regime – particularly the NPT itself – that has come under strain in recent years. The NPT may suffer from inherent structural flaws of discrimination and inefficiency due to the political compromises necessary to ensure its adoption during the Cold War era, and therefore represents a problem of the status quo; its precipitous abandonment would nonetheless do little to further non-proliferation efforts. Instead, as Meyer (2009) suggests, given that the NPT and its weaknesses can be exacerbated or remedied by the action or inaction of its members, concerned states should do more to revive and strengthen its core features. This necessitates a renewed focus on disarmament, primarily through greater N-5 commitment to their Article VI disarmament obligations, and further efforts to gain entry into force of both the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty. Further measures would involve a strengthening of the IAEA's verification role, an upgrading of the treaty's scant governance procedures, and sustained engagement with those nuclear states currently outside of the NPT framework.

Supplementing this at the regional level – as for example has tentatively occurred with India and Pakistan in recent years (Hilali, 2005) – various confidence and security-building measures can be pursued by state and non-state actors alike to assuage interstate security concerns. Such measures also dictate the potential for the gradual construction of pluralistic 'regional security communities', a concept originally pioneered by Karl Deutsch within the post-war European context, in which the use of force as a policy option is itself delegitimised between states. Through the building of common identities and trusting relationships, security dilemmas may be transcended and lead instead to "dependable expectations of peaceful change" among communities of states (Deutsch et al., 1957: 5). As Wheeler (2009) describes, specifically nuclear trust-building was clearly in evidence with the construction of a security community between Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s, both of whom subsequently abandoned their nascent nuclear weapons programmes.

Thus what is apparent is that while the concerns over horizontal proliferation articulated by powerful actors such as the USA may dominate popular discourse, those with lesser voices have regardless continued to shape the possibilities for an alternative order. This already envisages the possible creation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention that explicitly outlaws nuclear weapons, a measure now apparently supported by 146 governments across the world (ICAN, 2012). It is therefore incumbent upon agents of change to pursue such endeavours if a more sustainable form of world security is to be achieved – one in which mutual fear, and a tenuous nuclear balance of terror, is instead replaced by cooperation and trust.

Conclusion

Adopting a Critical Security Studies perspective, this paper has sought to provide a critique of the broader ideas underlying the notion that proliferation is a major threat to international security – in the belief that, as theory is constitutive of reality, and that we as theorists therefore have a normative obligation to identify sites of desirable political change, ideas are of *fundamental* importance in the study of world politics. Not only the practice, therefore, but also the study of security is inherently and inescapably politico-ethical in nature – always being for someone and for some purpose. For those of us who do not wish to believe that human society must accept a fatalistic conception of anarchy, with security predicated on statist assumptions of the utility of nuclear weapons, theory as praxis offers a means of emancipation. As such, this paper has sought to identify the various flaws in the arguments presented by proliferation optimists, while also providing a path to an alternative nuclear order.

The approach taken above is certainly not without its limitations. Notably, the role of dialogue and the identification of suitable agents of change are particular aspects of CSS that remain susceptible to criticism and require further exploration. It has also chosen to retain a focus on the proliferation of weapons by states rather than non-state actors; however, the argument presented here is one that ultimately sees the principle threat as being state-centric and

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driven by security dilemma logics. Furthermore, given that it is the current order that is problematic in and of itself, a move toward threat reduction should, all the same, focus less on counter-proliferation and more on gradual disarmament as a means of greater international and world security.

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Nuclear Proliferation Through Critical Security Studies

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[1] Writing from a pluralist English School perspective, Bull (1977) offers a particularly lucid defence of the privileging of international [interstate] order, considering it prior to and necessary for the attainment of international or world justice.

[2] The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) estimates that as of December 2012 North Korea's current nuclear stockpile may be less than ten weapons, without clear evidence of any operational capability (FAS, 2012).

[3] Given that this has effectively frozen the nuclear status quo of 1967, it has been portrayed by many as a form of "nuclear apartheid" (Biswas, 2001) in separating the haves from the have-nots in its privileging of 'legal' weapons status.

[4] A notable variation on this theme, from an offensive rather than defensive realist position, is Mearsheimer's (1990, 1993) rather Eurocentric advocacy of 'managed' proliferation, ideally to the so-called major powers alone.

[5] Cognitive dissonance theory even suggests that those who exhibit a more rational thinking style are disproportionately prone to escalation bias, owing to a stronger belief in the correctness of their own prior decisions (Wong *et al.*, 2008).

[6] The continuation of low-level conflict between India and Pakistan is seen by some as the result of a "stability-instability paradox" induced by nuclear symmetry, whereby greater stability at the high-cost strategic level is accompanied by greater instability at the low-cost tactical level (Kapur, 2005; Mistry, 2009). Much like deterrence theory, whether this holds at all times and does not spill over into major conflict remains disturbingly open to question.

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