

# Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?

Three Models in Search of  
a Bomb

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# Introduction

- Why is it important?
  - Predicting the long-term future of international security
  - For current foreign policy efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons
- Simple Answer?
  - Inadequate to focus simply on national security considerations
- Why?
  - Tools for national security, political objects, or normative symbols

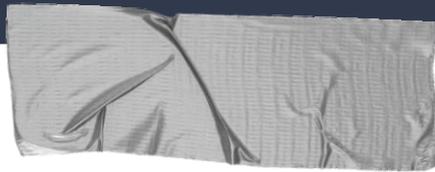


# The 3 Theoretical Frameworks

1. “The Security Model”
  - a. To increase national security against foreign threats
2. “The Domestic Politics Model”
  - a. Nuclear weapons as tools to advance parochial domestic & bureaucratic interests
3. “The Norms Model”
  - a. Nuclear weapons as normative symbols of a state’s modernity & identity

# Nuclear Futures: What Strategy?

- Something to consider:
  - This will be a critical problem in international security for the foreseeable future
- NPT review conferences every 5 years
- About 57 states now operate or are constructing nuclear power or research reactors
  - About 30 countries today have the necessary infrastructure & scientific expertise to build
- Addressing the sources of political demand for nuclear weapons
  - Policies designed to address one future proliferation problem will exacerbate others



# The Security Model

**Hypothesis:** States use nuclear weapons as a deterrent tool or as a coercive tool to force a change in the status quo

→ **Concept of Balance of Power**

What is the pain you cure with your solution?

→ **2 Policies**

Strong States vs. Weak States

→ **“Proliferation begets proliferation”**

Most common explanation →  
Strategic chain reaction

# Nuclear Restraint: Explained

- South Africa case:
  - Government saw a growing Soviet expansionist threat to South Africa
  - 6 atomic weapons constructed
- Nuclear Strategy:
  - Use the bomb both as a deterrent against the Soviets & as a tool of blackmail against the US
- Cause:
  - Absence of the fundamental military threats that produce positive proliferation decisions

# Policy Implications: Security Model

1. U.S. nuclear commitments to key allies is crucial
2. Collective action problem
  - a. Exercise restraint with increased confidence
  - b. The degree to which nuclear states negotiate nuclear disarmament will not significantly influence the behavior of non-nuclear states, since it will not change their security status

# Problems: Security Model

- Evidence Bias?
  - Dependence on statements of motivation by key decision-makers, who have a vested interest in explaining that the choices they made served the national interest
- Spurious Relationship?
  - A correlation in time between the emergence of a plausible security threat & a decision to develop nuclear weapons

# The Domestic Politics Model

## Bureaucratic Actors

- Not seen as passive recipients
- Create conditions that favor weapons acquisition
- Encourage extreme perceptions, promote supportive politicians, actively lobby for increased defense spending

## Scientific-Military-Industrial Complex

- Initial ideas developed inside state laboratories
- Scientists find or create sponsors in military who favor the particular weapons system

## Political Coalition

- Builds broader political support within the executive or legislative branches
- Shapes perceptions about the costs and benefits of weapons programs

# Case Study: India

- 1964 Chinese nuclear test → Bureaucratic battle fought inside the New Dehli political elite & nuclear energy establishment
- 1971 Prime Minister Gandhi developed an alliance to fabricate a nuclear device
- Domestic Political Concerns at Hand:
  1. Decision to test was made in a very small circle
    - i. Defense and foreign affairs officials were not involved
  2. Absence of a systematic program for nuclear weapons
    - i. Focus on political concerns rather than security interests
  3. Domestic support for Gandhi was at an all time low... and there was a major increase in support for Gandhi government after the testing



# The Norms Model

**Hypothesis:** States' nuclear decisions serve important symbolic functions- both shaping & reflecting a state's identity

→ **State Behavior**

Determined by norms & shared beliefs about legitimate actions

→ **Importance of roles, routines, & rituals**

Interests pursued according to these

→ **Leaders' perceptions of appropriate & modern behavior**

Power & coercion

# Policy Implications: The Norms Model

- Recognition that such norms can have a strong influence on other states' nuclear weapons policy
  - Norms being used to push others toward policies that serve interests
- Influence of the norms of NPT
  - U.S. decision on Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
- Produces a more optimistic vision of the future of nonproliferation
  - Nuclear reactions to security threats can be avoided because of normative constraints
- Bottom line:
  - Emphasis on emerging norms highlights need for nuclear powers to reaffirm their commitments to global nuclear disarmament

# Conclusions: Causal Complexity & Policy Tradeoffs

- Security Model is inadequate
- Heart of the problem: Multi-causality
- Main Point:
  - Nuclear weapons proliferation/nuclear restraint have & can occur for more than one reason
  - Need for different casual models
- Future Research:
  - How different governments assess nuclear potential & intention
  - Why pro-bomb & anti-bomb domestic coalitions form
  - When & how NPT norms about legitimate behavior matter