**Are nuclear weapons different?**

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Magnitude of Destruction – Are nuclear weapons so destructive that they can or should only be used as a deterrent?

**The Concept of Deterrence**

Deterrence – Definition

Deterrence: To discourage attack through the threat of retaliation. “If you attack me, I may not be able to prevent

your attack, but I can retaliate so powerfully that you will not want to attack in the first place.” (Nye, p. 123)

The Cold War 1945 - 1991

**Total War and Mutually Assured Destruction**

Clauswitz and the concept of Total War, no longer served purpose of war to enhance state

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Mutually Assured Destruction

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Necessity of second strike capability

Massive retaliation, Eisenhower – threatened with nukes for all war

**The Central Problem of Credibility**

Stability in a nuclear world depends on credibility of coercive threats i.e. does your adversary believe you will execute them?

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Credibility challenges:

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Do you have the will (resolve) to execute these threats? Willing to pay the cost

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Do you have the capability to execute these threats? Bahamas cannot threaten us

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Alliance complications: will you surrender your own cities to execute these threats? Not enough troops in west Europe so we threatened Moscow with nukes, but once soviets had nukes

**How Demonstrate Credibility? Capabilities**

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Some weapons systems vulnerable, could undermine deterrence if destroyed in first strike

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Less of a problem with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)

**How Demonstrate Credibility? Demonstrating Resolve with Irrevocable Commitments**

Public statements in democracies that would be politically costly to reverse

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The threat that leaves something to chance, bomber pilots discretion to bomb

**How demonstrate credibility? The challenges of protecting allies with extended deterrence**

Cold War: US protects Western Europe from invasion by Soviets with nuclear umbrella

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But...will US trade NYC to protect Paris?

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If Soviets doubt credibility of that commitment, they might invade; if French doubt credibility of that commitment, they might exit alliance and opt for neutrality

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Cold War solutions

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Tripwires: troops in West Berlin and along the border between North and South Korea to die (commitment mechanisms)

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Eisenhower contemplates giving W. Germany nuclear weapons so they can deter Soviets on their own, but German problem

**RECAP: Central role of credibility to nuclear stability**

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In a nuclear world, peace and/or stability rests on threats to engage in violence, not actual use of military force

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Effectiveness of threats depends on credibility

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Examined three aspects of credibility problem

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Capabilities

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Importance of demonstrating (signaling) resolve

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How protect allies

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In a nuclear world, balance of resolve matters more than the balance of military power

**Mutually Assured Destruction and Stability**

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The stability of MAD (star wars, SDI)

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When both sides possess a second-strike capability neither side has an incentive to initiate conflict

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The instability of missile defense

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Capability to destroy incoming missiles eliminates secure second strike capability of adversary

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Might tempt holder into launching first strike as can destroy retaliatory strikes in the air

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Might face significantly reduced costs of destruction that are key to stability of nuclear deterrence

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The vulnerable side has incentives to:

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Engage in a military buildup to overwhelm missile defenses

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Initiate a preemptive strike before missile defenses are operational

**Nuclear proliferation: stabilizing or destabilizing?**

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Proliferation generally discussed in horizontal terms i.e. more countries getting the bomb

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Sometimes vertical (nuclear states getting bigger stockpiles)

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Proliferation pessimism: more states with nuclear weapons means higher risk of nuclear war, nuclear accidents

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Proliferation optimism: because costs of war so high in nuclear world, nuclear weapons stabilizing

**Proliferation Optimism**

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Associated with Kenneth Waltz

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Nuclear weapons generate tremendous caution in a crisis, deterrence limits aggression, extreme cost

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Secure second strike capabilities fairly easy to achieve (can hide, use mobile launchers)

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Adversary can never be sure will get them all in first strike, therefore don’t attempt

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Helps to limit violence in wars, both states caution about escalating conflict because might face nuclear retaliation

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States have strong incentives to maintain control of nukes, no terrorist sharing

**Proliferation Pessimism**

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Associated with Scott Sagan

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Recent proliferators fewer nukes and less likely to possess secure, second strike capabilities

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Organizational impediments within military over command and control

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Tradeoff between readiness (capability to launch quickly in a crisis) and safety

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Military (developing countries) more concerned about readiness

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New proliferators less likely to have stable civilian control over military

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Risk of unauthorized or accidental use

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Period of vulnerability during stage of nuclear weapons development might heighten risk of preventive war

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Example: Israeli pressures on US for strike against Iran

**US: strong national interest in preventing proliferation**

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Part of this stems from reasons cited by Sagan

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Also, nuclear weapons great equalizer: blunts advantage of great powers (like the US) in conventional weapons

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Freezes territorial status quo for nuclear armed states: cannot invade without risking nuclear retaliation

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Takes military coercion or threat of regime change off the table for the United States and other great powers

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Compare “Axis of Evil”: Iran, Iraq, and North Korea

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If don’t have nuclear weapons (Iraq), get invaded; if do have nuclear weapons (N. Korea), get tough diplomacy

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Creates incentives to get nuclear weapons

**Mandelbaum, How to Prevent an Iranian Nuclear Bomb**

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Note that Mandelbaum starts from a specific perspective on nuclear proliferation (pessimist)...is he a nuclear optimist or nuclear pessimist?

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Mandelbaum argues that Iran must not be allowed to get a nuclear weapon. Why?

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Political consensus in U.S. that Iran must not get a nuclear weapon

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Unlike N. Korea, Iranian bomb could spark regional nuclear proliferation

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Unlike MAD during Cold War, nuclear competition in Middle East would be unstable

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South Korea opposed U.S. military intervention in N. Korea, Iran’s neighbors would not oppose U.S. military intervention in Iran

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How best to keep Iran from getting the bomb?

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Does not take a position on Iran nuclear deal. Asks instead what to do if Iran cheats, the deal is canceled, or the deal expires

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Dismisses “snap-back” economic sanctions

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Argues for deterrence – threatening military intervention if Iran tries to get a nuclear weapon

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Deterrence against an Iranian nuclear bomb:

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Difference with Cold War deterrence of Soviets – preventing attack vs. preventing acquisition of weapons

**Mandelbaum, How to Prevent an Iranian Nuclear Bomb, cont’d**

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Requirements of Deterrence against an Iranian nuclear bomb:

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Requires clarity and credibility

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Problems with clarity

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Defining what violation would trigger military response

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Detecting violations

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Problems with credibility

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Previous U.S. behavior – tolerating Iran’s nuclear program, Obama’s nuclear deal – may lead Iran’s leaders to doubt threat of military intervention

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Deterrence needs extra steps to be credible – resolute articulation and greater military presence