THE IMPORTANCE OF NUCLEAR DERERRENCE AND NUCLEAR TABOO

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Introduction

Since the Second World War in the 1940s, after two devastating nuclear strikes in Japan, there has been no war-related detonation of a nuclear bomb around the globe up to this time. The world seems to have learned the lesson that nuclear weapons simply cannot be deployed for any rational reasons, as they negate the supreme value of life and fail to function as instruments of good governance. In order for nuclear weapons to be "good", if it is at all possible, they should never be used in the first place (Red Cross, 1999: 19). However, the possession of nuclear arms has an unseen benefit, explained by the reason that the nation with such weapons can use them as a deterrent against countries that plot aggressive plans towards other countries. Notwithstanding their minuses, deterrence and the nuclear taboo were rather effective in discouraging the international community from using nuclear weapons against each other.

However, after the 9/11 bomb attacks, the major nuclear superpower, the United States, has become increasingly concerned with global terrorism and with the fact that some suicidal terrorist groups or affiliated governments may eventually gain control of nuclear weapons and use them for mercenary goals (Elworthy and Rifkind, 2005). Facing a terror threat will undoubtedly go beyond simply tracking down potential terrorists or issuing mild warnings to rogue states that they will be condemned for their actions. It might require banning all nuclear weapons as viable instruments of warfare. This is one of the instances, when things are easier said than done, because this policy can be very difficult to implement (Huth, 1999). The situation brings about the need for the reassessment of the relative impacts of deterrence on sustaining a nuclear-free and peaceful future. It also calls for revisiting the concept of the nuclear taboo – a set of normative beliefs condemning the use of nuclear arms – and its potential in harnessing countries' nuclear ambitions and non-proliferation.

The following paper mainly focuses on the prickly issue of deterrence and the nuclear taboo by outlining their advantages and disappointments in regard with containing the global nuclear threat. It starts from general background information on the first detonations of nuclear weapons along with grave consequences, which they have brought about. It goes on to explain the concepts of "nuclear deterrence" and "nuclear taboo" as seen by scholars, practitioners and policymakers. The literature review makes use of current books, periodicals, and online publications on the problem, as well as provides insights into possible ways of nuclear non-proliferation in the future.

Background to Nuclear Weapons

The first nuclear bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945 as an experiment at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The U.S. government wanted to test the impact of the newly found weapon of destruction. President Truman, who had just taken office from his predecessor Franklin, had less control of international affairs than Franklin had. Besides, the internal power transformation and little experience that Truman had in diplomatic affairs with other countries led to his decision to try out the first nuclear bomb. Truman only wanted to see the impact of the newly created bomb, yet he did not have enough knowledge of possible consequences apart from his curiosity (Price and Tannenwald, 1996).

During the Second World War, Japan significantly advanced in technology, such that the USA and Russia, being the main superpowers, were starting to get concerned. The USA was not originally interested in joining the war. However, it was evident that there would be the emergence of the third superpower (Tannenwald, 2005). The USA was concerned that if Russia were the first to hit Japan, it would get control of it. Therefore, backed by the council of foreign advisors, Truman ordered to launch the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, on August 6, 1945. Three days later, another bomb hit Nagasaki (Wittner, 1998).

As it was put officially, the USA's desire to end the war led to the use of the first atomic bomb in the history of humankind. The bomb was intended to end the long period of the Second World War and to limit Russian expansion in Japan (ibid.). However, that event was followed by the total destruction of Japan, in political, social, and economic spheres. The mere aftermath of the first atomic bomb detonation was terrifying. About 70,000 inhabitants in Japan's Nagasaki got deprived of their lives in seconds after the bombing had occurred. However, the precise number of victims remains unknown because of the heat that cremated many people. During the following years, over 300,000 people died because of the detrimental effects of radiation (Bundy, 1988). The nuclear bombing profoundly affected the entire genetic makeup of Japan, and the effects on the population can be traced even today.

That was when the world witnessed the adverse effects of nuclear power for the first time. The outcome was so devastating that every nation was terrified, including the USA, which had launched the weapon. Nonetheless, the first detonation also altered the national state of security and diplomatic relations across the globe, and more countries started to develop nuclear arms and engage in the arms race. Many governments began funding some nuclear programs. It was the fact that created an impending risk of future detonations (Baylis and Garnett, 1991).

Indeed, Truman accomplished his goals by ending the Second World War and testing the innovative nuclear invention of U.S. scientists. The U.S. being the first to use the deadly weapon came as a lesser evil, since there were fears, even voiced by Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard, that if Hitler had developed the first bomb, he would have inflicted more serious destruction in order to rule the world. However, after the first atomic test in the desert, Germany surrendered. This eliminated the possibility of Hitler accessing the atomic bomb (Waltz, 1981). Fortunately enough, nuclear weapons were not used in the times of war again.

The happenings in Japan also gave rise to the school of deterrence and the nuclear taboo as methods of preventing a nuclear war in the future.

Deterrence

Nuclear deterrence is the use of a military threat against the enemies of a state. It is a more general term referring to the threat of military actions as an intimidation tool to scare off aggressive countries from getting involved in militarized conflicts (Price and Tannenwald, 1996). Nuclear power may have a great coercive force when simply presented as a threat without its actual use. In this paper, the term "deterrence" is used to refer to the theory of war, especially in connection with nuclear weapons.

Historically, deterrence was the main strategy used by two major superpowers – the USA and the USSR. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the Soviet Union threatened to bomb the USA, John F. Kennedy decided to negotiate in peace talks (Elworthy and Rifkind, 2005; Garnett, 1987). That is because any states getting involved in a large-scale nuclear conflict are exposing themselves to the possibility of the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), a military doctrine professing that such a nuclear conflict will be equally annihilating for both the defender and the attacker (Huth, 1999). It means that a nuclear war itself has no winners. Instead, states will want to be in the condition, when they have the nuclear power always ready, but never used. Therefore, deterrence was behind Kennedy's decision to settle the Cuban incident with the USSR peacefully.

Thomas Schelling (1994: 112) explains the foundation of deterrence as a theory based on diplomacy. Diplomacy is the process of bargaining between nations seeking outcomes in their best national interests. Diplomacy works best when there is a common interest. It also helps to avoid mutual damages. In an ideal diplomatic scenario, war can only be accidental, rather than a result of a military strategy or purpose. Schelling argues that the threat of the use of nuclear weapons will influence other nations to defend their national interests more

aggressively. Each nation possessing nuclear weapons often protects its own interests or those of affiliate countries through diplomatic coercion or threats of the use of nuclear arms. In order to coerce or deter a state, the interested party anticipates that violence should be avoided by accommodation (ibid.). It becomes obvious that the success of deterrence lies in issuing threats, rather than the actual destructive use of weapons.

According to Huth (2009: 25), deterrence as a policy falls under two wide categories, including (i) precluding a military action against a third state and (ii) precluding a military action against the country's own territory. Situations of the first type take place when a major superpower decides to get involved, although indirectly, in a third party dispute. Situations of the second type occur when a major superpower becomes a party of a territorial dispute itself. Huth continues to state that deterrence policy emerges in response to a certain short-term threat with the probability of growing into a full-fledged war.

According to Jentleson et al. (2005: 47), the success of deterrence policy rests on two factors. First, it should balance sensible diplomacy with moderate coercion, while minimising international and domestic restraints. Second, very often the abilities of the aggressor state are shaped by internal political and economic capacities. Thus, a state having nuclear weapons and wishing to implement deterrence policy on such a state may impose appropriate economic or political sanctions, which will make the aggressor think twice or face large costs of disobeying. In the politics of deterrence, all parties concerned should understand all sticks and carrots of acting in a particular way (Wittner, 1998). The most important part of this policy is understanding the consequences of perpetration into another country.

Both proponents and opponents of deterrence converge on the fact that inadequate assessment of the international and domestic reality by government leaders may significantly hinder the success of deterrence (Huth, 2009: 26). That means that if a country using deterrence strategies against other countries gradually loses its influence, a military solution

may seem more appealing than deterrence. There are some other shortcomings, for which the deterrence theory is criticised. For example, some critics claim that psychotic or suicidal governments cannot be influenced by any form of deterrence (Towle, 2000: 164). In addition, if both opposing states own nuclear arms, one state may try to hit another one and incapacitate the second state in making a response strike by swiftly destroying its nuclear arsenal (Sagan, 1997). Finally, an intensified arms race between powerful states may automatically lead to higher odds of a nuclear war outbreak in the future, no matter how strict the deterrence policy is (Huth, 2009: 26).

The United States and the Soviet Union were extensively building nuclear weapons stations during the Cold War. The USSR was convinced that the Cold War could be fought and controlled. On the other hand, the USA was convinced of deterrence as a credible means against retaliation (McGwire, 1994). During the war in Vietnam, which lasted for 20 years, both the USA and the USSR keenly monitored each other's moves in the military sphere. The mutual arms race and the occasional exercise of the military power created a solid foundation for deterrence for both rivals. That was because they were fully aware of the destructive consequences, which their nuclear arms could bring about for both nations in the case of violent confrontation (McNamara, 1995). It made the Cold War a successful example of the deterrence policy.

However, in the article *Nuclear Endgame: The Growing Appeal of Zero,* the former actors of the Cold War – Kissinger, Shultz, Perry, and Nunn – spoke against the deterrence policy that they had so confidently supported in the past. They rejected their previously held opinions and maintained that nuclear arms were nowhere near from being safe for the world today.

> The risk of accidents, misjudgements or unauthorised launches was growing more acute in a world of rivalries between relatively new nuclear states that lacked the security safeguards developed over many years by America and the Soviet Union. The emergence of pariah states, such as North Korea

> (possibly soon to be joined by Iran), armed with nuclear weapons was adding to the fear as was the declared ambition of terrorists to steal, buy or build a nuclear device (*Nuclear Endgame: The Growing Appeal of Zero*, 2011).

In order to continue deterrence in the era of strategic nuclear equivalence, it is still necessary to have nuclear weapons as such, so that it will be too costly for any adversary, launching military attacks against us to get involved in the conflict. However, should the deterrence fail, we must still be capable of fighting successfully using conventional means so that the adversary will not achieve the set goals (Terriff, 1995).

The Nuclear Taboo

The school of thought on deterrence is opposed by the theory of the nuclear taboo. The nuclear taboo is both a widespread inhibition to using nuclear weapons in other countries and a global scenario for the world politics (Tannenwald, 2008). The development and influence of the nuclear taboo is primarily related to the U.S. leaders. There were some instances, when the latter considered using nuclear weapons, for example, in Japan in 1945, during the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War in 1991 (Baylis & Garnett, 1991). Fortunately, since bombing Japan, the U.S. has never used nuclear weapons again and cautioned other world leaders against resorting to the use of nuclear weapons (Freeman et al., 1967). The conventional conceptions of deterrence are used as a threat and balance for collective security and nuclear restraint by providing an important insight into how a nuclear war can be avoided in the future.

According to Tannenwald (2008), the nuclear taboo is a result of investigations, analysis, and writing on the devastating effects of nuclear weapons. Nina Tannenwald, in her book *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*, argues that it is not the realist stress on self-interest and the cost-benefit evaluation of rationalists, which have contributed to the non-use of nuclear weapons since 1945. She successfully integrates the constructivist theory with more conventional explanations, such as

the deterrence theory, to explain how various ideas related to a national identity – the reasonable use of weapons, the morality in warfare, and norms – have played important roles in the world. She stresses on how the bottom line of the taboo has emerged from mere beliefs within the entire public that have exerted a lot of pressure on political leaders (see also Elworthy and Rifkind, 2005). Subsequently, those beliefs were later legally institutionalised in arms control agreements.

Tannenwald's (2008) detailed how nuclear decisions made in the White House had been of massive interest for a wide audience. She arranged her book into three integrated themes: a historical account of the non-use of nuclear weapons by the U.S. since 1945; the factors and processes linking rationales and self-interest, which have contributed to the emergence of the nuclear taboo; and the effects of the evolving nuclear taboo on the foreign policy of the United States. In her argument, the norms of the nuclear taboo have influenced the U.S. warfare decisions in three main ways. First, the norms define the constraints of acceptable actions that limit policy options and strategies. Second, these norms are constitutive and have impacts on how they shape identities; for example, the identity of a sovereign nation that outlines a regime and strategy preferences. Third, the nuclear taboo can be used to disguise the production of conventional weapons from scrupulous international attention (Elworthy and Rifkind, 2005).

Other than her constructivist explanation, Tannenwald (2008) makes a detailed evaluation of five alternatives: deterrence, military utility, the fear of establishing future standard limitations of materials, including the lack of organisations, systems and capabilities for utilisation, and the growing obsolescence of the main conflicts. Rather than blaming the taboo as the sole source for non-use, Tannenwald explains it as one of the reasons. She further points out that deterrence mainly depends on the nuclear taboo. To heighten the credibility of her research, she uses case studies to trace back the origin and evolution of the

taboo, as well as to show how the ethical discourse affected the decision-making policy of the U.S. administration (Tannenwald, 2005).

However, the concept of the nuclear taboo was not easily established. Prior to events in Japan, President Eisenhower's State Secretary, John Foster Dulles, advocated against the taboo. He argued that the United States should always consider using nuclear weapons for defence, that is, if the security of the nation was at stake, it could alter original agreements for defence purposes (Waltz, 1981). Nonetheless, the taboo proved to be very strong in spite of other instances when governments with nuclear weapons were tempted to use them. For instance, Truman also wanted to use nuclear arms against Chinese troops in Korea. Nixon considered deploying nuclear weapons in the Vietnam War. The Israeli government was in the process of doing the same in the 1973 war with Egypt. The Soviet Union wanted to use nukes in Afghanistan during the Cold War. Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of Britain, wanted to use them in the Falklands (Towle, 2000). Incidentally, in all those cases, nuclear weapons would have been unleashed against a country with no such weapons. Nevertheless, those extreme intentions have never materialized and probably have reinforced the power of the nuclear taboo even further.

On the other side of the debate, there is a fear of the superpowers that nuclear weapons can get into the hands of terrorists. In particular, such fears concern the Iran’s government and various terrorist groups that can potentially acquire nuclear weapons for their evil plans (Lutz and Lutz, 2007). The counterargument is that nuclear weapons are too precious to be given away even by rent-seeking governments; while using them to merely kill an enemy is also overly expensive (Solingen, 1994: 126). Nuclear weapons have been used for 60 years, but not on the battlefield or on the civil population, they have been used for the purpose of deterrence.

The nuclear taboo also works through several treaties concluded by governments to limit the use of nuclear weapons. They have been successful in restricting the use of weapons and punishing countries daring to use them (McNamara, 1995). Some treaties include the INF, START-I, START-II, the Outer Space Treaty, the Antarctic Treaty, the Seabed Treaty, the Southeast Asia Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, the Africa Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. All these treaties and regimes restrict the arms race and opt for nuclear disarmament. The observance of treaties and nuclear non-proliferation agreements is largely contingent on the willingness of governments to act in favour of the international community (Price and Tannenwald, 1996). Thus, nuclear disarmament should be a part of each government's agenda. Any country, where it does not take place, endangers the whole system.

The nuclear non-proliferation regime has been in effect for more than 30 years. With this policy, there is the prevalent pressure of keeping the research and the production of nuclear weapons within certain limits. The promotion and the development of nuclear arms control and disarmament have become a complex task with high demands and efforts (Terriff, 1995). Since the USA and the USSR signed several treaties on disarmament, some states have still possessed the capacity for a nuclear program, namely South Africa, Argentina, and Brazil. Under persisting international pressure, they might soon give up their intentions to have nuclear weapons, in the same way as Ukraine did in 1994 (Abbott et al., 2006). The situation is more complex in Iran and North Korea, which neither abide by the non-proliferation principles, nor appear to show respect for the existing nuclear taboo.

Nuclear Dilemma and International Security

The world exists as a system of international relations. States are sovereign to the extent that there is no international body strong enough to control everything. Each state is responsible for its own security, protection and survival (Buzan and Herring, 1998).

Machiavelli, the father of real politics, argued that all states existed to acquire, maintain, and expand power. According to him, realism is the best approach to reach solutions in international relations. He holds that the world exists in the state of anarchy, and this fact creates foundations for both deterrence and retaliation (Booth, 1997).

On the other hand, such idealists as Woodrow Wilson argue that states are potentially peaceful. They should come together to become collectively secure to punish any deviant state endangering the world. Wilson was the main founder of the League of Nations, which unfortunately failed to avert the Second World War. The former prime minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher also advocated for the principles of good neighbourliness as a solution to world peace (Maoz and Russett, 1993). Nonetheless, the problem of idealism was that it had failed to deter countries from exercising aggression. The state of anarchy and nuclear problem was bigger than diplomacy talks. After the Second World War, it was evident that realism was the only solution to maintaining peace (Booth, 1997).

Thomas Hobbes argued that an international body, which was strong enough to control all states, was the only solution. The newly created United Nations organisation, in the lieu of the League of Nations, was made up of major superpowers working against the possibility of the Third World War. The organisation has served as a mediator in solving disputes among countries and creating a platform for an international dialogue. It is also one of the bodies performing nuclear arms control and promoting the nuclear taboo among its member states (World Public Opinion, 2007). Despite all shortcomings in the United Nations' operations, it brings about hope of avoiding nuclear disasters in the future.

Conclusions

In his insightful speech delivered to the Boston Chamber of Commerce in 1948, Omar Bradley, a senior U.S. Army Commander, uttered, "The way to win an atomic war is to make certain it never starts." After the annihilating nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

the world seemed to have realized economic, political, and civilizational consequences of using nuclear weapons for military purposes. It suddenly dawned upon us that nuclear power was an easily misused source of ultimate destruction that had to be reined in as soon as possible. The policies of deterrence and the nuclear taboo emerged as a response to that change of attitudes in the world.

In theory, deterrence and the nuclear taboo are not watertight: they both have advantages and shortcomings. Their main shortcoming consists in their relative costs as compared to conventional military actions, such as a nuclear war. If the costs of war are lower than compliance, then deterrence strategies may prove useless in preventing the war. Fortunately, in practice, deterrence and the nuclear taboo have been able to prevent any further military-related nuclear tragedies. The Cold War was an illustration of this.

However, what is unfortunate is that the future still holds uncertainties. Pariah governments and terrorist groups tried to use the nuclear taboo to their own advantage. By means of their actions, they put the established international order in jeopardy and increased the likelihood of further tensions in major superpower countries. International controlling bodies, such as the United Nations, are vested with the enormous responsibility for preserving peace and nuclear non-proliferation by enforcing existing nuclear arms control treaties and disciplining deviant countries. It appears that the policies of deterrence and the nuclear taboo will soon become less effective and should be adjusted by some additional security measures, including those in political and economic environments (World Public Opinion, 2007). Those measures may be a subject of further research in this field.

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