

What Explains a Country's Motivations to Forgo or Rollback Its Nuclear Weapons Program?

Conventional wisdom has an explanatory power in the motives of nuclear weapon chasers. Those who try to acquire nuclear capabilities look for, among probable others, prestige, influence, deterrence, regional and international status, strategic and political value. However, there are many others who renounce their proliferation efforts and do not follow suit with potential proliferators. In this paper, I offer five reasons as to why some nations prefer to forgo their nuclear weapons programs and conclude the discussion with an attribute to Egyptian case.

1. Security? Maybe right the opposite

Controversially, proliferation may reduce a country's security if that country does not improve its conventional capability, such as combat power, strong ground forces capable of defending the borders, air force and a competent air defense system to defend the air space, and finally, powerful navy and a coastal defense force. Chubin (2001) asserts that nuclear weapon capability does not entail automatic deterrence and further argues that "credible deterrence *inter alia* is achieved by the creation of an effective operational force ... [n]uclear weapons cannot substitute for conventional weapons." Therefore, I contend that nuclearization has an undeniable risk for the possessor as it might create hubris and cause to take battle-readiness for granted.

2. Weapons of last resort

Nuclears are not all-purpose and flexible tools, rather, merely weapons of last resort particularly when the national existence is in jeopardy. They are not workable virtually in none

of the conflicts and especially not in low-level threats. According to Chubin (2001), “nuclears are relatively useless against spillovers of instability from neighboring states, subversion, and cases of intimidation. In such cases threats of nuclear use are inherently disproportional, lack credibility, and threaten to lower the threshold of use and to make these weapons all-purpose rather than exceptional instruments of conflict.” Since nuclear weapons are mainly developed for the purposes of deterrence and international prestige and almost have a “no-use” feature, they are unusable for relatively small conflicts as well as domestic security concerns.

Moreover, acquisition of nuclear weapons, in and of itself, is not adequate. The need for very secure command and control systems following the possession is as critical, maybe more, in acting in a responsible manner. Their magnitude, scale of destruction and long-term consequences for people put even more pressure on the possessors. It should be kept in mind that there is always the risk of a war because of an unauthorized use, accidental detonations, or false alarms. Add to this the domestic pressure on military mechanisms, namely the compulsion for military leaders of being in a constantly alert situation.

Finally, it is a very challenging task to discriminate between friends and adversaries in the case of using nuclear arsenal. For instance, it would be impossible to make the Palestinians avoid a possible nuclear attack if Egypt would have decided to make one against Israel.

3. Economic factors

Nuclear weapon development or acquisition is -in many cases- intolerably expensive. The economic side of nuclearization is complicating as the mission does not end with the possession. Their life-cycle costs are high and these costs have to be borne along with conventional military expenditures (Chubin, 2001). Because of the desperate need for social

programs and other liabilities of a state, heavy allocations for nuclear spending at times of budget austerities are not economically rational and will come at the expense of health, education and social security systems particularly for developing nations.

4. International pressure and diplomatic isolation

In the era of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was opened for signature on 1 July 1968 and entered into force on 5 March, 1970, there are reasons to anticipate remarkable international pressure on a future proliferator even if it is not a signatory. The legitimate recognition of the proliferator might be in question, as in the case of India for many years, and the efforts of acquiring a nuclear arsenal may end up with significant loss of political capital.

Nuclear pursuer might face undesirable outcomes such as reduction or removal of security guarantees, alienation from international community, unilateral, bilateral or multilateral sanctions -including those coming from UN-. Moreover, a proliferator will have the shadow of the future in terms of having the difficulty of presenting herself as a low-profile defense state. As in the case of Egypt, which will be discussed below, who is provided roughly \$1.3 billion in annual military aid from the United States, there will also be the challenge of holding long-lasting diplomatic alliance equations in a stable manner.

5. Game theoretical approach

Acquisition of nuclear weapons may well trigger a similar pressure on the adversaries and neighbors to acquire similar capabilities; hence, one party's possession leads to arms races and decreasing security. Paul (2000) contends that "nuclear forbearance is the result of a conscious effort by technologically capable states not to create an intense negative security

externality for other significant actors that will be most affected. These states realize that their nuclear acquisitions would be costly and that they may compel other significant states to take counter-measures thereby decreasing their own security ... forbearance may allow a nation to minimize risks and thereby avoid possible losses to its security.” In other words, following the cost-benefit calculations nuclear forgoers act like prudential realists and try to avoid threatening others while acting like maximizers with regards to their own security. Chubin (2001) lays out that acquisition of nuclear weapons should have a *net effect* on enhancing security and not aggravate already existing security problems.

Having mentioned all the aforementioned points, let me try to briefly exemplify the Egyptian case. The more secure a country feels, the less tendency it has to acquire nuclear weapons. Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979 and subsequent agreements between Palestinians and Israelis, and Jordanians and Israelis in 1993 and 1994 reduced the Israeli security threat to Egypt and made it closer to US. On the other hand, Aly (1996) acknowledges that even though Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty did not help curtail the Israeli nuclear arsenal, Egypt still signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968, ratified it in 1982 and froze all of its nuclear programs in 1986. It should be noted, here, that another development accelerated Egyptian decision to join NPT. When the Carter administration decided in 1980 that only NPT parties would be eligible for US power plant financing, it became apparent that Egypt could only realize its nuclear energy plans -which started from early 1970s- by joining NPT. Indeed, Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali told the People’s Assembly in February 1981 that “Egypt found itself unable to develop its electric power through access to nuclear energy unless it ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty.” (Einhorn, 2004)

According to Aly (1996), “Egypt did not use the ‘nuclear issue’ to create tensions in the Egyptian-Israeli relations, but rather raised it as a fundamental point of difference that should be tackled by understanding and negotiation. Again, with the game theoretical approach, Egyptian government preferred to resolve the Israeli nuclear dilemma by trying to put pressure on Israel to forgo its capabilities. Presidential Advised el-Baz makes it even more clear in saying that the answer was “not to go nuclear, but to force the other side to denuclearize.” Einhorn (2004) lays out the broader perspective for Egypt that “seeking for nuclear weapon capability would undermine higher national priorities, especially peace and stability in the region, economic development, and close ties with the United States.”

© Yansi ERASLAN

References:

- Abdel Monem Said Aly, “In the Shadow of the Israeli Nuclear Bombs: Egyptian Threat Perceptions”, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol III, is 2, Summer/Fall 1996.
- R. Einhorn, “Egypt: Frustrated but still on a non-nuclearcourse”, in Kurt Campbell, R. Einhorn, Mitchell Ross (eds) *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2004.
- Shahram Chubin, “Iran’s Strategic Environment Nuclear Weapons”, in Geoffrey Kemp, ed., *Iran’s Nuclear Weapons Options: Issues and Analysis*, The Nixon Center, 2001.
- T. V. Paul, “Chapter II: Explaining Nuclear Forbearance”, *Power Versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000.