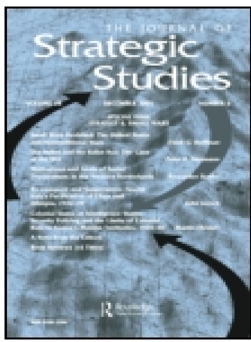

Journal of Strategic Studies

ISSN: 0140-2390 (Print) 1743-937X (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fjss20

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To cite this article: Francis J. Gavin (2012) Politics, History and the Ivory Tower-Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate, Journal of Strategic Studies, 35:4, 573-600, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2012.715736

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2012.715736

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The Journal of Strategic Studies
Vol. 35, No. 4, 573–600, August 2012

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

REVIEW ESSAY

Politics, History and the Ivory Tower-Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate

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Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, **The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate**. *New York: W.W. Norton*, 2012. Pp. 270. $22.50, HB. ISBN 978-0-393-92010-9.

By definition, a debate requires at least two opposing views, and there are no shortage of debates in Washington on foreign policy and national security affairs. But in a political system where vehement disagreement is the norm, one issue produces a powerful bipartisan consensus among American foreign policy officials: the spread of nuclear weapons is a grave challenge to US national interests and must be halted, if not reversed. While there have been differences in tone and at times substance, every administration and every Presidential candidate since the Cold War ended has agreed that the United States must have a robust nuclear nonproliferation policy. In a city where scores can be found to debate even the most extreme and polarizing national security positions, it would be hard to find a serving or former US national security official in Washington DC who would champion the idea that nuclear proliferation was anything but deeply dangerous, destabilizing, and inimical to American interests.

This is one of the factors that make the widespread popularity and scholarly influence of the Sagan–Waltz ‘franchise’ so fascinating. Kenneth Waltz, the author of *Man, the State, and War* and *Theory of International Politics*, is the world’s most important living theorist of international relations. Scott Sagan, a Stanford professor and former director of the prestigious Center for International Security and

ISSN 0140-2390 Print/ISSN 1743-937X Online/12/040573-28 © 2012 Taylor & Francis
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2012.715736

Cooperation, is perhaps the leading scholar of the causes, consequences of, and potential remedies to nuclear proliferation. Sagan and Waltz published their first version of the debate in a volume, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, in 1995.[1] The success of the book, combined with significant changes in the world of nuclear politics – India and Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests, the 9/11 attacks and the rise of Al-Qa'eda, a renewed US interest in missile defense, and the increased concern over so-called 'rogue' nuclear states such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea – inspired a second volume, *A Debate Renewed,* published in 2002.[2] They return again, 17 years after they first engaged, with a revised third edition, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*.[3]

The new book has updated the earlier volume and added new chapters on Iraq, North Korea, and Iran, and the Global Zero movement. The authors' core positions, however, have not changed, and remain simple and powerful. Waltz sees the spread of nuclear weapons as both inevitable and not to be feared. Why? The overwhelming power of nuclear deterrence – the ability of a state, not to defend itself, but to threaten an adversary with unacceptable damage if attacked – brings the possibility of war between nuclear-armed states close to zero. In a nuclear world, a state does not have to know how much punishment to expect from an adversary; in fact, the very uncertainty increases caution and enhances deterrence. And even if a nuclear weapon or two were used in a conflict, the horrifying consequences of further escalation would soon bring leaders to their senses and allow cooler heads to prevail. Waltz does not believe the character or regime type of the nuclear state counts for much. In fact, weak or authoritarian nuclear states have greater incentives to keep them under tight control and, understanding the consequences of a nuclear reprisal, are likely to be less, not more aggressive. Waltz argues that the history of the nuclear era proves his theory: despite great tensions and geopolitical competitions, deterrence has prevented great power war since 1945. He sees no reason why the powerful logic of nuclear deterrence would not operate in the same way among new nuclear states. Policies ignoring these realities are misguided and foolish.

[1]Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (New York: W.W. Norton 1995).

[2]Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton 2002).

[3]Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate* (New York: W.W. Norton 2012).

Interestingly, Sagan's rebuttal does not directly challenge Waltz's claim about the extraordinary power of nuclear deterrence to induce fear and caution, at least in the abstract. His approach is to look inside the 'black box' of the state and investigate who within it would build, control, deploy, and potentially use nuclear weapons. Based on an organizational approach, Sagan makes two key claims: first, 'military organizations – because of common biases, inflexible routines, and parochial interests – display behaviors that are likely to lead to deterrence failures and deliberate or accidental war'.[4] Second, 'there are strong reasons to believe that future nuclear-armed states will lack the positive mechanisms of civilian control'.[5] Such a world is a place where mistakes, miscalculations, and aggressive policies may thrive.

According to Sagan, stable deterrence requires three conditions. First, there must not be a preventive attack on a nascent nuclear state while it is building its forces; second, nuclear rivals must have a 'second-strike' capability, meaning that a sufficient number of nuclear weapons can survive an attack to guarantee devastating retaliation; third, nuclear forces cannot be 'prone to accidental or unauthorized use'. Much of their disagreement involves assessing the historical record to assess how easy or difficult it is to meet these conditions. Waltz, unsurprisingly, sees these stipulations as easily met, given the incentives a potential nuclear state has to fulfill them. Sagan, conversely, believes these three conditions to be more elusive than we have recognized, and in view of the likely nature and regime type of future atomic aspirants, will be even more difficult to achieve. Recent events – the US-led war against Iraq, North Korea's and Iran's interest in nuclear weapons, debates over missile defense, the conflict in South Asia, the Global Zero movement – have not caused either scholar to shift his perspective or change his core position.

It is not hard to understand why these volumes have been so popular, especially in the classroom. Waltz's simple but compelling argument about the power of nuclear deterrence to induce caution, regardless of region, regime type, or circumstance, is a powerful corrective to the 'alarmist' views that often shape public discussions about nuclear proliferation. Nuclear weapons have not been used in anger since 1945, and common sense tells us that deterrence must have played some role in keeping the Cold War from becoming hot. Bad states with atomic bombs, Waltz reminds us, are not new; despite contemporaneous predictions to the contrary, Stalin's Russia and Mao's China acquiring nuclear weapons was not a catastrophe. And while not impossible, the

[4]Ibid., 42.
[5]Ibid., 43.

challenges to a non-state actor to acquire, assemble, deliver, and successfully detonate a nuclear device are enormous. It is highly unlikely a state, even a bad state, would simply turn over its weapons to terrorist groups, nor is it clear that all such groups are motivated by the irrational or even suicidal inclinations often ascribed to them.

Sagan's analysis of how complex and competing organizations function (or do not) is an important alternative to the widespread acceptance of the rational, unitary state. Complicated systems can break down, humans make mistakes, and bureaucratic interests often diverge from national policy. How theory claims states 'should' behave is not always how they act in the real world. Given how horrific any nuclear use would be, Sagan's more cautious approach appeals to common sense.

What are we to make of this book, 17 years after it first appeared? Sagan and Waltz deserve extraordinary credit for constructing a sharp but respectful debate, where bold claims and counter-claims are made without sacrificing civility. This is all too rare in our intellectual discourse and should serve as a model. And while Waltz's and Sagan's core arguments have remained constant, their exchange has shaped a generation of scholarly research and dominated the debate on the causes and consequences of nuclear proliferation within the international relations field.

Still, there is something strangely disquieting about the franchise. Two problems in particular stand out. The first is methodological: the occasionally selective and simplistic use of history to buttress theoretical and prescriptive claims is distressing. The new edition, and Waltz's chapters in particular, proceed without recognizing the emergence of reams of top-level, declassified documents from around the world over the past two decades, which provide a view into the history of nuclear statecraft and proliferation dynamics that was previously unavailable.[6] While this new history pulls in different

[6]One organization that is doing extraordinary work to identify, declassify, and make accessible declassified documents on nuclear statecraft from around the world is the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project, an effort led by Christian Ostermann and Leopoldo Nuti, <www.wilsoncenter.org/program/npihp>. This project is part of the Woodrow Wilson's Cold War International History Project, which has produced countless documents, briefs, and reports on nuclear issues over the past 20 years. Two other notable organizations declassifying and publishing important documents on nuclear statecraft include the Parallel History Project, <www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/index.cfm> and the National Security Archive, <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/index.html>. Two recent international conferences give just a small sample of the work being done – one hosted by the Nobel Institute in Oskarsborg, Norway, in June 2009 and another hosted by Center for Security Studies in Zurich in June 2010, <www.css.ethz.ch/events/archive/academic_research/Uncovering_Sources_EN>.

directions, it seems irresponsible not to vigorously engage the new primary materials and resulting scholarship. Rigorous history should surprise, and one hopes, cause an author (and the reader) to revisit and potentially challenge long-held assumptions; this book, and Waltz in particular, analyzes the past selectively, more to validate fiercely held positions than to break new ground.

A more serious problem, however, is the purpose and intended audience of the book. The authors emphasize they do not see their effort merely as an academic exercise: 'We believe that political scientists should try to help improve government policy.'[7] Yet there is little evidence that these volumes (and again, particularly Waltz's arguments) has or will influence national security officials. Waltz's argument is deeply problematic, contradictory, and not taken seriously by people who matter, while Sagan's broad recommendations may be seen as right by many decisionmakers but for the wrong reasons. If Sagan and Waltz's arguments fail to engage, to say nothing of find favor, among those who make government policy, what is the explanation? Are American policymakers simply blind or foolish? Or have the academics – not just Sagan and Waltz but all those who see this debate as the starting point for any discussion of proliferation – missed something crucial about the question of how nuclear proliferation affects American interests, something essential that many scholars miss but most policymakers, and the citizens they work for, understand in their bones? And if true, what does the enduring success of the Sagan-Waltz franchise say about what international relations scholarship contributes to national security policy?

Bringing Politics Back to International Relations

What does the past reveal about nuclear dangers? Does the historical record demonstrate that nuclear weapons always induce caution and create stability between rivals, and does deterrence consistently work in the way Waltz, and to a lesser extent, by Sagan, assume?

In an important review of the second edition of *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, Marc Trachtenberg pointed out that the supposedly

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Each hosted over a dozen scholars using new archival materials to analyze the origins, developments, and consequences of nuclear programs around the world, including Pakistan, India, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Yugoslavia, and Italy, among many others. The papers from the CSS conference have not yet been published, but some of the papers from the Nobel Conference can be found in Olav Njolstad (ed.), *Nuclear Proliferation and International Order: Challenges to the Non-Proliferation Treaty* (New York: Routledge 2011).

[7]Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, xi.

stabilizing qualities Waltz ascribes to nuclear weapons – characteristics Sagan did not challenge – may actually *increase* the chance for misperception and miscalculation between nuclear states.[8] Wars are not simply 'started' by one side or another, as Waltz would have it, where one country is an obvious aggressor and the other side seeks merely to defend itself. More often, conflict emerges from a political process where two sides interact. In that process, the so-called balance of terror can cut in different directions. While the prospect of nuclear devastation should induce caution during a crisis, if *both* states understand this logic of deterrence and expect their adversary does as well, there are powerful motivations to engage in what Thomas Schelling called 'contests in risk taking'.[9] While each might be afraid of escalation, that fear could be balanced by an understanding that his rival is also afraid. If both adversaries accepted the deterrence model at the heart of the Sagan–Waltz franchise, each might dig in his heels, convinced the other side would back down when confronted by the danger of nuclear war. It is easy to see where a crisis between two nuclear states pursuing deterrent strategies could quickly get out of hand and even lead to war.

These kinds of competitive dynamics existed before the nuclear age, of course. But the supposedly stabilizing qualities of nuclear weapons touted by Waltz also make dangerous miscalculations more likely. Why? According to most realists, the balance of military power shapes how states behave in world politics. In the pre-nuclear age, a state would size up an adversary by calculating its chances of prevailing in a military conflict. In the past, if country A had 100 tanks, and country B had 300 tanks, and tanks were the weapons most likely to determine the outcomes on the battlefield, A would be highly unlikely to press its claims against B too far, and would be quick to back down lest a clash of arms leave A defeated.

But what does the balance of military power mean in the nuclear age? As Waltz argues, nuclear weapons are the 'great equalizers'. The overwhelming conventional military power that previously drove world politics has far less relevance in a nuclearized world. B's 3:1 advantage in tanks, for example, would be of little use in a crisis if A had a survivable nuclear force. Nuclear deterrence is so robust that the fear of even a handful of nuclear weapons being used against its cities should be enough to keep B from invading, even if its advantage in every other military and economic category was overwhelming.

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[8]Marc Trachtenberg, 'Waltzing to Armageddon?', *The National Interest* (Fall 2002), 144–52.

[9]Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1966), 176.

Waltz contends – and most so-called defensive realists agree – that such a world is more stable and peaceful. But imagine that instead of tanks, country A has 100 nuclear weapons and country B 300. Under Waltz's rules of nuclear deterrence, the numerical balance is irrelevant: both sides *should* be unwilling to act aggressively. But what if A exploited B's admirable risk aversion? B might back down in face of A's brinksmanship, in order to avoid a nuclear war. Invoking Schelling, Trachtenberg explained such a world creates a perverse, potentially destabilizing incentive structure, *rewarding* bad behavior, even by the weak:

> In the pre-nuclear world ... the weak tended to give way to the strong ... But in a world of invulnerable nuclear forces, as Waltz points out, the military balance counts for little ... in such a world there would be a great premium on resolve, on risk-taking, and perhaps ultimately on recklessness.[10]

This is not just a theoretical argument. The history of the Cold War, the same history Waltz and many others rely on to argue for the peace-inducing qualities of nuclear deterrence, reveals examples of how a nuclearized environment can be destabilizing when subjective factors like *resolve* and *interest*, as opposed to the balance of military power, come into play. Consider an *easy* test of Waltz's argument that nuclear deterrence stabilizes relations between states: the four-year standoff between the Soviet Union and the United States over the jurisdictional status of Berlin.[11] If Waltz's framework fails here, where the conditions for nuclear deterrence were ideal, we might question its applicability to other, future cases, where the factors producing stability should be harder.

Waltz's world presumes an aggressor and a defender, and a clear sense of what is and is not worth risking a thermonuclear war. In reality these crucial issues are not always obvious. Who would be the aggressor and who would be the defender in a war over Berlin? When Khrushchev told US Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson he could not believe 'we would bring on such a catastrophe' as a nuclear exchange over Berlin, the Ambassador retorted, 'it was he

[10]Trachtenberg, 'Waltzing to Armageddon', 149.

[11]The Cuban Missile Crisis should also be an easy test, and others have revealed how nuclear weapons made it far more dangerous and unstable than it was. In fact, in a non-nuclear world, there may not have been any crisis, and hence, no instability. For a recent account using new evidence that reveals just how unstable and dangerous the crisis was, see Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Knopf 2008).

who would be taking action to change the present situation.' Khrushchev disagreed, arguing 'we would be ones [that] would have to cross [the] frontier'.[12] The lines between aggressor and defender were blurred throughout the crisis.

Waltz and others have argued that in a nuclearized world, the side with the greater interest and resolve would be clear, and that any crisis would most likely be settled on terms favorable to that side. 'States are not likely to run major risks for minor gain.'[13] But to whom did the outcome of this struggle over West Berlin matter more, the Soviet Union or the United States? The latter had publicly and forcefully declared that its stakes in the city were vital and the credibility of its commitment was at stake. 'If we were to accept the Soviet proposal, US commitments would be regarded as a mere scrap of paper.'[14] Yet, West Berlin added nothing to the material strength of the United States or the Western Alliance, and its loss would have no effect on its position in the overall balance of military power. Both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy understood the Soviets had a legitimate vital interest in stabilizing the status of Berlin and the military and political status of Germany and that it could not be defended with conventional forces. Both engaged in negotiations to ease tensions and resolve the crisis.[15] Neither President was pleased with the situation. Eisenhower 'expressed unhappiness that here is another instance in which our political posture requires us to assume military positions that are wholly illogical'.[16] Kennedy agreed: 'So we're stuck in a ridiculous situation ... It seems silly for us to be facing an atomic war over a treaty preserving Berlin as the future capital of a reunified Germany when all of us know that Germany will probably never be reunified.'[17]

[12]Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 24 May 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, [hereafter *FRUS*] Volume XIV (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office 1998), 67.
[13]Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, 6.
[14]'Memorandum of Conversation', *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Volume V, 218.
[15]Kennedy clearly appreciated the high stakes for the Soviet leader. 'Khrushchev is losing East Germany. He cannot let that happen. If East Germany goes, so will Poland and all of Eastern Europe.' Frederick Kempe, *Berlin 1961* (New York: Putnam 2011), 293.
[16]Memorandum of Conversation with President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles, 30 Nov. 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Volume VIII, 143. At another point, President Eisenhower stated, 'we should not have committed ourselves as deeply as we had to Berlin, where he said the situation was basically untenable, as in the case of Quemoy and Matsu.' Memorandum of Conversation Between President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles, 18 Nov. 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Volume VIII, 85.
[17]Kempe, *Berlin 1961*, 220. 'God knows I am not an isolationist, but it seems particularly stupid to risk killing a million Americans over an argument about access

Khrushchev, like Waltz, believed the number of nuclear weapons he had did not matter in this contest of wills. 'Missiles are not cucumbers,' he liked to say, 'one cannot eat them and one does not require more than a certain number in order to ward off an attack.'[18] But as Frederick Taylor points out, and contrary to Waltz's position, thermonuclear weapons made Khrushchev 'more, not less, bold in his foreign policy calculations'. This was based on his belief that 'Secretary of State Dulles's threats of massive retaliation were also bluff – brinksmanship based on the fact that both sides knew where the brink was and would act accordingly'.[19] But was the location of the brink clear to both sides? When Khrushchev's son, Sergei, asked his father if his ultimatum would lead to war, the Soviet leader replied 'of course not! No one would want a war over Berlin ... Before that time came, his threat would scare the West into negotiations.' When his son asked what would happen if the negotiations failed, Khrushchev was irritated. 'Then we'll try something else.'[20]

The existence of a deterrence strategy on both sides meant that it was difficult for either side to back down. As the US Ambassador to the Soviet Union observed, this created the real possibility of misperception leading to nuclear war. 'Both sides consider other would not risk war over Berlin. Danger arises from fact that if K carries out his declared intentions and we carry out ours, situation likely get out of control and military as well as political prestige would become involved making retreat for either side even more difficult.'[21] Khrushchev expected the Americans to back down before things got serious, but leaders in the United States expected the same kind of restraint. While the Soviet leader may have wanted to avoid a nuclear war, 'the real danger is that he might risk just such a war without realizing he is doing so'.[22]

This is not to say that all disagreements between nuclear-armed states always have to operate like a Schelling-esque competition in risk-taking. Consider again the situation over West Berlin, only a few years later. The jurisdictional status of the city, the supposed touchstone of

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rights on an Autobahn in the Soviet zone of Germany, or because the Germans want Germany reunified.' W.R. Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2009), 75.

[18]Alexsandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton 2007), 243–4.

[19]Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: A World Divided, 1961–1989* (New York: Harper 2007), 105.

[20]Ibid., 116.

[21]Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 27 May 1961, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Volume XIV, 77.

[22]Position Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 'Berlin and Germany', 25 May 1961, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Volume XIV, 74.

the 1958–62 crisis, had not been resolved when the Nixon administration took office in 1969. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger told President Nixon, 'given the city's vulnerabilities' the Soviets could 'manufacture pretexts for harassment whenever they choose' and 'strangle the city'.[23] The United States would have had far less leverage if such a situation arose. As Nixon told the West German Chancellor, due to 'disturbing developments' US strategic superiority had been eliminated while Soviet conventional capabilities had been increased. 'In 1962, at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US lead in strategic missiles had been so massive that no rational decisionmakers on the Soviet side would have risked war.' By 1969, the new President argued this was no longer the case.[24]

A strange thing happened, however – despite small-scale tensions surrounding West Berlin, and fears of a new crisis, the Soviets pursued a mild, even conciliatory policy, and sought to formalize the status quo with the West in a treaty. The Soviet Ambassador to West Germany stated, 'the Soviets respected the fact that West Berlin was occupied by US, UK, and French military forces'.[25] Their Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, made it clear that the Soviets had no 'intention of undermining the status quo in Western Europe', and did not 'care about formal recognition of Eastern Germany'.[26] Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko assured Nixon the Soviet Union had 'no intention to weaken the status of the allied powers in West Berlin'.[27] Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev even offered that any agreement on West Berlin would have to meet the 'wishes of the Berlin population'.[28] The Soviets offered a settlement which Chancellor Willy Brandt observed was more favorable than what 'was discussed in Geneva in 1959' or what Dean Acheson's Berlin report to President Kennedy hoped to achieve in 1961, periods when the US possessed nuclear superiority. A genuinely surprised Kissinger agreed: 'I feel that we're doing better than, than I thought possible.' This success was possible in spite of the fact, as Brandt pointed out, 'that we all know the

[23]Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, 24 Jan. 1969, *FRUS: 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 9.
[24]Draft Memorandum of Conversation, Bonn, 2 Feb. 1969, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 44.
[25]Telegram from the Mission in Berlin to the Department of State, 8 Jan. 1969, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 5.
[26]Editorial Note, 3 March 1969, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 49.
[27]Editorial Note, 22 Oct. 1970, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 377.
[28]Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, 25 Jan. 1971, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 495.

military position rather is more favorable for the Soviet Union than it was then'.[29]

Why, only a few years after a dangerous and destabilizing crisis shaped by the nuclear balance and brinkmanship, was the same issue resolved in a relatively amicable manner where nuclear weapons appeared to play no role at all? The answer is a simple but often forgotten reality, at least in the deterrence and proliferation literature, and one that that is absent throughout most of the Sagan–Waltz franchise: politics intervened. The crisis over Berlin in the late 1950s and early 1960s was largely a proxy for the unresolved and contentious political issues surrounding West Germany's military status: whether or not the Federal Republic of Germany would have access to nuclear weapons. By the late 1960s, this problem had been resolved, and both powers were happy with the status quo: a divided, non-nuclear Germany within a divided Europe. The Soviet leadership no longer needed to threaten West Berlin, so nuclear weapons played little role in the negotiations that led to the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin in September 1971.

The framework that is adopted by Sagan and Waltz – a focus on the weapons and postures, and not the underlying politics – still dominates the scholarly analysis of these issues. Consider the widely divergent nuclear postures chosen by states like China, Pakistan, and the United States. Despite few financial or technical constraints, China has puzzled outside observers with an unsophisticated strategy that has not achieved the level of assured destruction that most US strategists would have predicted.[30] Pakistan's strategy eschews assured destruction in favor of a potentially dangerous and destabilizing asymmetric escalation posture that calls for the early use of nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict with India.[31] The United States approaches nuclear primacy against its former rivals, particularly Russia, alarming analysts who argue it undermines the strategic stability that leads to

[29]Conversation among President Nixon, German Chancellor Brandt, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, and the German State Secretary for Foreign, Defense, and German Policy, 15 June 1971, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XL, 741–8.

[30]M. Taylor Fravel and Evan S. Medeiros, 'China's Search for Assured Retaliation: The Evolution of Chinese Nuclear Strategy and Force Structure', *International Security* 35/2 (Fall 2010), 48–87.

[31]Vipin Narang, 'Posturing for Peace? Pakistan's Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability', *International Security* 34/3 (Winter 2009–10), 38–78. Narang's analysis does highlight an excellent point: arms control professionals have focused on the number and quality of nuclear weapons, when what might matter much more are the strategies, postures, and deployments of weapons. Pakistan's arsenal may be dangerous not because of its size or quality but because of how Pakistan deploys and may use it.

peace.[32] In each of these cases, international relations scholars are at pains to explain these divergences from an ideal deterrent strategy.

What seems puzzling to many security studies scholars – states not embracing the optimal, or most stabilizing, nuclear strategy demanded by deterrence theory – might be explained by understanding the political goals the state in question was seeking. For a China interested primarily in deterring attacks on its homeland, a minimal deterrent may have sufficed. Pakistan, seeking territorial adjustments against a bitter enemy with larger conventional capabilities, may need a more aggressive nuclear posture to secure its interests, regardless of how destabilizing it is. The United States may pursue primacy less to threaten Russia than to strengthen its vast array of 'nuclear umbrella' commitments, to re-assure and prevent proliferation by potential allies like Germany and Japan. The absence of any fundamental existing political dispute between the United States and Russia that might lead to a war would seem to be a far more important indicator of future stability or conflict than the nuclear balance.

Whether these specific assessments are correct is not the point. Rather, no policymaker would assess the consequences of proliferation or a state's nuclear strategy without trying to understand the goals, interests, situation, and character of that state. It matters if the potential proliferant in question is Sweden or Iran, less because of its regime type and more because of its external goals and interests (though those may be related). In fact, the nuclear posture may be important evidence in helping us understand the ambitions of each state in question. Which framework one chooses – whether to focus on the weapons or the underlying politics – has enormous policy consequences as well. What would be a more effective use of scarce diplomatic capital in South Asia – to seek strategic stability through arms control, or to make an effort to resolve the underlying political issues driving the posture?

Consider what many identify as the most important nuclear arms control effort, the Strategic Arms Limitation negotiations in the 1970s.

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[32]Kier Lieber and Daryl Press, 'The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of US Primacy', *International Security* 30/4 (Spring 2006), 7–44. Presumably, the United States possesses near-primacy against every nuclear (and non-nuclear) country in the world: why are France, Israel, and Great Britain not more alarmed? One might assume it is because the leaders of those states possess almost no conceivable scenario in which they can imagine the United States would use its forces against them. It might be that the passing of the intense geopolitical and ideological competition that followed the end of the Cold War has produced similar feelings in Russia. This is not to say there are not/will not be political disputes, just that it may be hard for decision-makers to imagine them rising to the level where the use of nuclear weapons would be likely.

An unimpeachable belief in the strategy and arms control community is that SALT and SALT II were unalloyed goods, the cornerstone of strategic stability. There is an alternative view. Negative reactions within the United States poisoned foreign policy debates and gave rise to neo-conservatism.[33] The Soviet military was furious as well, which may have led to the deployment of SS-20 missiles.[34] The SALT agreements inspired great mistrust and unhappiness among many of America's European allies, and the deployment of the SS-20s generated a crisis in NATO.[35] These efforts to establish strategic stability, it could be argued, perversely helped undermine détente by the late 1970s.[36] Might the enormous political capital expended on the SALT negotiations between the Russians and Americans have been more productively spent on other issues? Obviously, focusing on arms control or politics is not mutually exclusive – the point is that they are inextricably linked – but nuclear strategies do not emerge from a political or historical vacuum, a fact often absent from the academic literature on proliferation, deterrence, and strategic stability.

This is not to say that we should discount the influence of the nuclear revolution on international politics – as the Berlin examples demonstrate, they are profound – or eschew theories and only try to explain things on a case-by-case method. Nuclear behavior since 1945, however, has eluded parsimonious explanation. The history is just emerging and pulls in many different directions. We have and will continue to get a better sense of this from the massive increase in the volume of declassified documents revealing how different states wrestled with the question of developing and deploying nuclear

[33]See especially Justin Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2010).

[34]Odd Arne Westad, 'The Fall of Détente and the Turning Tides of History', in Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years* (Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian UP 1997), 15. To see further details of the Soviet reaction, and the theory that Brezhnev may have allowed the SS-20 deployment to placate a Soviet military angry over SALT I and SALT II negotiations, see David Holloway, 'The Dynamics of the Euromissile Crisis, 1977–1983,' unpublished paper.

[35]See especially Leopoldo Nuti (ed.), *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985* (New York: Routledge 2009). On documents relating to the Euromissile crisis, see Timothy McDowell (ed.), *The Euromissiles Crisis and the End of the Cold War: 1977–1987* (2009), <www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-euromissiles-crisis-reader>.

[36]For the idea that obscure debates over nuclear strategies and deployments masked deeper differences in geopolitical outlooks, particularly in the United States, see Francis J. Gavin, 'Wrestling with Parity: The Nuclear Revolution Revisited', in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2010), 189–204.

weapons. It is a pity these important new sources are not more fully engaged in this book, or that greater attention is not paid to the core issue in international relations: politics.

Waltz the Theorist vs. Waltz the Moralist

In 1981 Waltz made a startling argument about the spread of nuclear weapons: 'more may be better'.[37] But whether more is better or worse may not even be the most interesting puzzle surrounding proliferation. Both Sagan and Waltz's analysis leave unanswered a very important question: if nuclear weapons are so effective at preventing war and providing security, why has there been so *little* proliferation since 1945? In the anarchic, self-help world of Waltz (and Sagan) where security is so scarce, one should have expected far more than nine nuclear weapon states to emerge in the past seven decades. Certainly several dozen countries have the technology and wealth to produce their own bombs, and have for some time. Intelligence assessments, policy analysts, and academic observers have, for decades, incorrectly predicted the pace of proliferation would intensify. Why are there not 20, 30, or 40 nuclear states by now, as many would have expected? Neither Waltz nor Sagan explores this question in a systematic way.[38]

One possible answer might be the realist description of the international system is false – the world is not so dangerous, that for whatever reason states feel so safe and secure that nuclear weapons are extraneous. Many factors, including the increased lethality of conventional wars, emerging norms and taboos, globalization and interdependence, and the decreasing appeal of conquest, may have made large-scale, prolonged interstate wars of conquest less likely even without the nuclear revolution. Or perhaps the answer is not that the world is safe, but that nuclear weapons do not provide as much security as deterrence advocates claim, and may make certain states feel more vulnerable and less safe.

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[37]Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better*, Adelphi Paper 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies 1981).

[38]Two scholars have recently done excellent work examining this question: Jacques Hymans and Etel Solingen. Regardless of what one thinks of his arguments, Hymans in particular is an exemplar of employing the method suggested in this essay: combining theory with extensive use of archival sources. Jacques Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identify, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2006); Jacques Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2012); and Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007).

Or perhaps the real way to understand the question is with another question – why has the United States gone to such extraordinary lengths to slow, halt, and reverse the spread of nuclear weapons? If nuclear deterrence is as powerful and stabilizing as Waltz and most defensive realists contend, why have US policymakers deployed so many tools and expended so much political capital on nuclear nonproliferation policies? One of the great but under-appreciated strands in US foreign policy and grand strategy since 1945 has been the consistent and powerful drive to inhibit the spread of nuclear weapons. Neither Waltz nor any other realist has developed a satisfying explanation for the long-standing American efforts to halt and reverse nuclear proliferation.[39]

In fact, this strong instinct should not be much of a surprise. As Secretary of State Dean Rusk once said, 'it was almost in the nature of nuclear weapons that if someone had them, he did not want others to have them.'[40] Since the nuclear age started, the United States has sought to limit nuclear acquisition by friends and foes alike, with what might be called strategies taken from a 'spectrum of inhibition', a range of soft to harder policies. On the softer side, the United States has tried to inhibit the spread of atomic weapons through international treaties and arms control regimes, including but certainly not limited to the Baruch Plan, Atoms for Peace, the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the London Suppliers Group, the Additional Protocol, and the Proliferation Security Initiative. At the other end of the spectrum of inhibition are 'harder', more coercive measures. Strong-armed policies to limit proliferation are not, as many would have it, a recent phenomenon. President George W. Bush's military efforts to eliminate Iraq's nuclear weapons were not a dramatic departure from past policies; in fact, preventive actions were seriously considered by the United States against the Soviets in the 1940s, China in the 1960s, and North Korea during the early 1990s. The American temptation to use force to limit nuclear spread has been a persistent feature of nuclear non-proliferation policy, regardless of administration, party affiliation, or structure of the international system.[41]

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[39]Shane Maddock also identifies the persistent US goal of atomic supremacy, but ascribes this policy to ideological rather than power political motives. See Shane J. Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press 2010).

[40]Rusk to State Department, 7 Aug., 1963, National Security File, box 187, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

[41]See Francis J. Gavin and Mira Rapp-Hooper, 'The Copenhagen Temptation: Rethinking Prevention and Proliferation in the Age of Deterrence Dominance', Working Paper, prepared for 2010 Tobin Project conference on Power Through Its

This harder, more coercive inhibition revealed itself in other policies. In the 1960s, for example, the US put extraordinary pressure on Israel to drop its nuclear program, made it clear to West Germany that its acquisition of nuclear weapons was unthinkable even if mitigated by a multilateral framework, and contemplated pressuring the British to abandon their atomic program.[42] The idea of sabotaging French nuclear tests was discussed.[43] During the 1970s, South Korea and Taiwan were threatened with an end to their alliance with the United States, a measure that would have exposed both countries to great peril, and along with Pakistan, were threatened with the disruption of the sale of sensitive technology, freezes in economic aid, and promises to cut off fuel supplies if they went nuclear.[44]

America's 'spectrum of inhibition' looks even more impressive if one expands the scope of what is included in its nuclear nonproliferation policies. Before the nuclear age, the United States had no history of making permanent alliances or providing security guarantees to far-flung nations, yet today, by some estimates America covers 31 states with nuclear umbrellas.[45] Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, from whom and what exactly are we protecting these states?[46] A large part of the US military commitment to Western

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Prudent Use, <www.tobinproject.org/sites/tobinproject.org/files/assets/Gavin%26 Rapp-Hooper_US_Preventive_War_Thinking.pdf>.

[42]On West Germany, see Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2003), and Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1946–1963* (Princeton UP 1999); on Israel, see Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia UP 1998); on the desire of many top US policymakers to get the British out of the nuclear business, see Richard Neustadt, *Report to JFK: The Skybolt Crisis in Perspective* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1999).

[43]Francis J. Gavin, 'Blasts from the Past: Nuclear Proliferation and Rogue States Before the Bush Doctrine', *International Security* 29/3 (Winter 2004–2005), 110.

[44]On Pakistan, see 'Congressional Consultation on Pakistan', State Department Cable 235372 to US Embassy, Vienna, 15 Sept. 1978, 3–4, National Security Archive, Pakistan Nuclear Development Collection. On South Korea and Taiwan, see Lewis A. Dunn, 'Half Past India's Bang', *Foreign Policy* 36 (Autumn 1979), and Rebecca K.C. Hersmann and Robert Peters, 'Nuclear U-Turns: Learning From South Korean and Taiwanese Rollback', *Nonproliferation Review* 13/3 (Nov. 2006), 547–8.

[45]'Arizona Senator's Support Sought for New START Pact', Global Security Newswire, 20 April 2010, <www.nti.org/gsn/article/arizona-senators-support-sought-for-new-start-pact/>.

[46]See Jeffrey W. Knopf (ed.), *Security Assurances and Nuclear Nonproliferation* (Stanford UP 2012). For three excellent unpublished papers that look at this issue, see Matthew Furhmann and Todd S. Sechser, 'Signalling Alliance Commitments: Hand-Tying and Sunk Costs in Extended Nuclear Deterrence', presented at the Texas Triangle Security Conference, Austin, Texas, Feb. 2012; Alexander Lanoszka,

Europe during the Cold War was motivated not only by the need to deter the Soviets but by a pressing need to keep the Federal Republic of Germany non-nuclear. Similar dual concerns – protection and restraint – motivated US security arrangements with Japan and South Korea. The benefits, from a proliferation perspective, went beyond simply keeping the target state non-nuclear. If West Germany did not have nuclear weapons, Italy, Switzerland, and Sweden, for example, might be inclined to abstain. A non-nuclear Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea likely weakened proliferation pressures in Indonesia and Australia. Inhibiting proliferation has been a core driver of US security commitments since the start of the nuclear age.

Other US policies that divert from the defensive realist notions of the ideal deterrent policies make far more sense when viewed through the spectrum of inhibition.[47] Nuclear strategies that exceeded the demands of mutual deterrence, including counterforce, escalation dominance, and an unwillingness to embrace no first use policies have often been explained as the product of bureaucratic politics, ideology, or misguided instincts. In fact, the need to assure states under the US nuclear umbrella, and to convince them to stay non-nuclear, may have required a more robust, forward leaning, and threatening nuclear posture. Seen in this light, American policy-makers' decades-long interest in missile defense may not be irrational and quixotic, as it is often portrayed, but a tool to inhibit the effects of nuclear proliferation.

Why has the United States pursued such vigorous nuclear non-proliferation policies against both allies and adversaries? On one level, government officials, regardless of political or ideological background, vehemently disagreed with Waltz's notion that nuclear weapons were a sort of magic wand that brought stability to an otherwise unstable system. On another, they recognized its extraordinary power of nuclear deterrence to be used *against* the United States, and understandably, would greatly prefer that it not be applied to them. As Matthew Kroenig argues, 'power-projecting states, states with the ability to project conventional military power over a particular target, have a lot

'Protection States Trust? Superpower Patronage, Nuclear Behavior, and Alliance Dynamics', Princeton University, 23 Jan. 2012; and Dan Reiter, 'Security Commitments and Nuclear Proliferation', 27 Jan. 2012. For a terrific article that uses new archival sources to show the link between US extended deterrence and Australia's decision to stay non-nuclear, highlighting the crucial differences between nuclear umbrellas in Asia vs. Europe, see Christine M. Leah, 'US Extended Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Order: An Australian Perspective', *Asian Security* 8/2 (Summer 2012), 93–114.

[47]Gavin, 'Blasts from the Past', 115–22.

to lose when that target state acquires nuclear weapons' whether they are enemies *or* allies.[48]

There are three reasons the US – or any leading power, regardless of regime type – would work overtime to inhibit proliferation. First, the overwhelming deterrent characteristics of nuclear weapons undercut America's broad and commanding superiority in other categories of power on issues of war and peace, and a world with more deterrence is a world where the United States is more constrained and in many ways weaker. Furthermore, smaller states can use their nuclear weapons for catalytic purposes, to pull the United States into a conflict it would otherwise avoid.[49] Finally, feeble nuclear powers may be more willing to pursue risky brinksmanship strategies in crises with an otherwise powerful United States. As Michael Horowitz explains, a feeble state 'possessing even a single nuclear weapon influences America's strategic calculations and seems to make coercive success harder'.[50] This logic, right or wrong, may have driven the Bush administration's effort to end Iraq's nuclear program, since proliferation 'neutralizes ... the overwhelming conventional power of the United States' and 'both dampens and encourages risk-taking, rewarding states that successfully push to the brink of nuclear war, and frightening the rest into submission'.[51]

It is completely rational for the United States – a state with overwhelming advantages in every other form of hard and soft power – to do whatever it can to keep these 'equalizers' out of the hands of others, friend and foe alike. The United States has and continues to possess the world's largest and most innovative economy, overwhelming conventional military superiority, command of the air, sea and space, favorable geography, and considerable soft power. In a world without nuclear weapons, the United States has no peer, and would have almost complete freedom to act as it sees fit. A system in which nuclearization reduces or even cancels out many of these extraordinary advantages – and potentially rewards nuclear brinkman-

[48]Matthew Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb: Technology Transfer and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2010), 3.

[49]There is some evidence that France, Pakistan, and possibly South Africa have thought about their nuclear forces this way. Relatedly, think how little control the United States has over how Israel deals with Iran's nuclear program; Israel's deterrent gives it both independence from the United States while restricting America's own freedom of action. Far better, from a US perspective, to deal with a nascent nuclear state like North Korea without the pressures and limitations that would be created by a nuclear South Korea or Japan.

[50]Michael C. Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics* (Princeton UP 2010), 106.

[51]Stanley Kurtz, 'Why We Must Invade Iraq', *National Review Online*, 16 Sept. 2002, <www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/751583/posts>.

ship – is one in which US policymakers will go to great lengths to prevent. Deterrence may be more stable for some – particularly states with no ability to project other forms of power – but unappealing for a leading power whose freedom to act is seriously constrained in a nuclearized world. Richard Betts has argued what may be good for some members of the 'system' – nuclear deterrence – may not be what the United States sees as in its own best interest. 'If nuclear spread enhances stability, this is not entirely good news for the United States, since it has been accustomed to attacking small countries with impunity when it felt justified and provoked.'[52]

Waltz is too smart not to realize how untenable his position is. Despite sharply criticizing US leaders for the divergences from the mutual vulnerability ideal throughout the book – from preventive war thinking to missile defense to efforts to achieve nuclear primacy – he recognizes his vision for the world is not one US policymakers, or any superpower, would ever embrace. He writes, 'A big reason for America's resistance to the spread of nuclear weapons is that if weak countries have some they will cramp our style. Militarily punishing small countries for behavior we dislike would become much more perilous.'[53] While mocking the US desire for missile defense, he captures the inhibiting appeal of such a system: 'In short, we want to be able to intervene militarily whenever and where we choose. Our nuclear defenses would presumably make that possible even against countries lightly armed with nuclear weapons.'[54]

Waltz argues that that by acting this way and inhibiting nuclear spread, US leaders are the bad guys and the small states are the victims. 'Our dominance presses them to find ways of blocking our interventionist moves. As ever, dominance, coupled with immoderate behavior by one country, causes others to look for ways to protect their interests.'[55] Waltz even recognizes that the American interest in global zero is less about international law, peace, and altruism than it is about US power:[56] 'Transparently, it is in America's interest to get presently

[52]Richard K. Betts, 'Universal Deterrence or Conceptual Collapse? Liberal Pessimism and Utopian Realism', in Victor A. Utgoff (ed.), *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, US Interests, and World Order* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2000), 65. In other words, the international system may prefer Waltz, but the United States – and any system leading power – will prefer Sagan, albeit for reasons other than those he laid out.

[53]Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, 100.

[54]Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, 105.

[55]Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, 106.

[56]In such a world, not only would the other elements of the US's preponderant nonnuclear power provide it with enormous advantages over everyone else in the system; its enormous nuclear infrastructure and technological know-how would make

nuclear states to reduce or, better yet, eliminate their warheads. We are, after all, the world's dominant conventional power and have been for years.'[57] But even if the goal could be achieved, it would be bad because the leading power in the system would be unrestrained. 'But how can any state hope to deter a world-dominant power? Conventional defense and deterrence strategies have historically proven ineffective against the United States, so, logically, nuclear weapons are the only weapons capable of dissuading the United States from working its will on other nations.'[58] This is a bizarre way for the word's leading realist to look at things – in what version of realism do states seek to constrain *their own power* by encouraging others to acquire the means to leave them weaker?[59] Does Waltz really think the United States is a bully, a revisionist state bent on war, 'fond of beating up poor and weak states'?[60]

Should the United States behave this way? Waltz thinks not; in many ways, I am inclined to agree with him.[61] But this is a *normative* question, a matter of informed opinion and policy preference. It is not social science. I might *prefer* that the United States resist the powerful and persistent temptation to coerce potential nuclear powers, friend and foe alike, up to and including serious consideration of preventive military force. I might *prefer* that the United States embrace a grand strategy of off-shore balancing, and shrink America's exposure from its vast extended deterrence commitments. But that does not remove my obligation as a scholar to try to understand and explain why these things happen *persistently and consistently*, across decades and shifting US administrations. As Waltz himself says in *Theory of International*

it the power who could most easily reconstitute its nuclear weapons, making it a de facto nuclear power. In a sense, it could be argued this would make the United States what John Mearsheimer calls a hegemon with no great power rivals with which to compete for security. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton 2001), 128.

[57]Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, 224.

[58]Ibid., 221.

[59]'Les Aspin, when he was chairman of the house Armed Services Committee, put this thought in the following words: "A world without nuclear weapons would not be disadvantageous to the United States. In fact, a world without nuclear weapons would actually be better. Nuclear weapons are still the big equalizer, but now the United States is not the equalizer but the equilizee."' Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate,* 107.

[60]'In the twenty years dating from 1983, we invaded six of them, beginning and ending with Iraq. Yet since the end of World War II, states with nuclear weapons have never fought one another.' Sagan and Waltz, *Enduring Debate*, 220.

[61]Francis J. Gavin, 'Same As It Ever Was: Nuclear Alarmism, Proliferation, and the Cold War', *International Security* 34/3 (Winter 2009–2010), 7–37.

Politics, governments are always being told to 'act for the sake of the system and not for their own narrowly defined advantage', but those urgings are pointless because states, given the kind of anarchic world they find themselves in, have no choice but to focus on their own narrow interests – they 'have to do whatever they think necessary for their own preservation.' With each country 'constrained to take care of itself, no one can take care of the system'.[62]

Waltz revolutionized international relations theory over 50 years ago in his classic, *Man, The State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis,* by severely criticizing realists like Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr for offering informed, passionate ad hoc opinion instead of rigorous theory. 'No matter how good their intentions, policy makers must bear in mind the implications of the third image .... Each state pursues his own interests, however defined, in ways it judges best.' A foreign policy that recognizes the anarchy of the international system 'is neither moral nor immoral, but embodies merely a reasoned response to the world about us'.[63] Historian Campbell Craig suggests Waltz rose to prominence arguing that writing that 'sought to advocate particular policies' was, 'not scholarship: it was normative policy recommendation. International politics had a logic all its own that defied the policy wishes of anguished political leaders and intellectuals. It was time, Waltz said, to study this logic analytically.'[64]

Waltz re-emphasized the structural approach in *Theory of International Politics*. War and peace was determined by the structure of the system, and it was bipolarity, not nuclear weapons, that produced stability. 'Nuclear weapons are not the great equalizers they were sometimes thought to be.'[65] Writing in 1979 and assessing the French nuclear force, which included nuclear submarines, bombers, and land-based missiles, Waltz argued that 'French officials continue to proclaim the invulnerability of their forces, as would I would do if I were they. But I would not find my words credible.'[66] Sounding more like Sagan than himself, Waltz contended that the 'prospect of a number of states having nuclear weapons that may be ill-controlled and vulnerable is a scary one, not because proliferation would change the system, but because of what lesser powers might do to one another.' Referring to

[62]Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1979), 109.
[63]Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia UP 1959), 238.
[64]Campbell Craig, *Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia UP 2003), 118.
[65]Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 180.
[66]Ibid., 181.

the delicate balance of power, 'Those dangers may plague countries having small nuclear forces, with one country tempted to fire its weapons preemptively against an adversary thought to be momentarily vulnerable.'[67]

Two years later, without acknowledging it, Waltz completely reversed himself, abdicating the detached perspective of the theorist of anarchy and bipolarity and shifting to Waltz the moralist with the publication of the first iteration of his views on proliferation, his famous 1981 Adelphi paper, which he expanded 14 years later in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*. As Craig summarizes:

> What explains international war and peace? Previously, it had been the anarchical structure of international politics, a force that human aspirations and fears were, in the end, helpless to overcome. Now, it was also the aversion to nuclear fear, a first-image phenomenon that resided in the hearts and minds of individual people.[68]

Opposing thermonuclear war is laudable, and Waltz is as welcome to express his informed opinion and policy preferences as the next pundit. As *opinion* and normative beliefs, I find some of what he says appealing. But Waltz has always been at great pains to say he is a *theorist*, a social scientist, above the mere ad hoc musings of punditry. But what are we to make of these theories? How do Waltz's ideas on nuclear weapons fit in with his earlier ideas that it was the *structure* of international politics – whether a system was bipolar, multipolar, unipolar – that determined war and peace, stability and instability? And what do terms like polarity and power mean in the nuclear age? If nuclear weapons 'equalize' other forms of powers, are not all nuclear states, even barely functioning ones like North Korea, poles? In his previous writings, the balance of military power mattered for quite a bit, while now, it appears to matter not at all. What is here that can 'help guide policy'?

Fixing the Franchise

Perhaps this critique is too harsh. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons* is, after all, a popular, respected, and much cited work, and if the arguments are not always fool proof, so what? The problems and contradictions in this book would not be particularly noteworthy, except for two reasons. First, the failure to engage and re-examine

[67]Ibid., 182.
[68]Craig, *Total War*, 161.

history vigorously is troubling. Second, and more importantly, the question of nuclear proliferation is of fundamental policy importance and the authors' explicitly aim for policy relevance. They must be judged on the terms they themselves laid out.

Making deductive arguments and cherry-picking from the past to justify claims discourages an effort to do serious historical work. Consider the following puzzle: under a neo-realist perspective, one might have expected a dramatic change in the international system – such as the end of the Cold War – to produce important and presumably uniform effects on the pace of nuclear proliferation. In the middle of the 1980s, Brazil, India, and South Africa had strong interests in nuclear weapons programs. By the late 1990s, however, each had gone in a completely different direction: South Africa, after building nuclear weapons, gave them up; India tested and became an overt nuclear weapons state, and Brazil decided to end its nuclear weapons program.[69] Nor did the United States do much to influence any of the three; each was, for the most part, immune to the American inhibition spectrum. Why the variation, when the states in question were so similar and the shift in the system presumably determinative? The only way we can know is to do careful historical work and reconstruct how and why these decisions were made.

The second issue is policy relevance. Decision-makers desperately need knowledge that could help them navigate the extraordinarily complex and consequential decisions they face as they construct nuclear nonproliferation policies. Consider the hard decision about what to do about Iran's nuclear efforts. Whatever the choices, the decisions will reverberate with important and unforeseen consequences for years. If the US decides to allow Iran to develop a weapon, will the regime be deterred? Will states in the region bandwagon or balance with Iran? Will Iran's neighbors develop their own nuclear weapons? Will Israel undertake a strike, albeit a less effective and comprehensive one, pulling the US into a conflict it never wanted? If the US did strike, would the regime in Tehran fall or become more entrenched? Would terrorism increase? What would be the wider implications for the global nonproliferation regime, the attitude of North Korea, the Arab spring, relations with Europe, Russia, and China, and what would be the effect on the global economy?[70]

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[69]I am grateful to Mariana Carpes for this insight, which is the focus of her very promising research project, 'Bringing the Region in: A Neoclassical Realist Approach for the Study of Rising Powers' Nuclear Strategies.' Nor can Waltz's theory explain the Ukraine's decision to give up its nuclear weapons when the Soviet Union collapsed.

[70]The best study of these questions, which combines policy insight and academic rigor, is Colin H. Kahl, Melissa G. Dalton and Mathew Irvine, *Risk and Rivalry: Iran, Israel*

No one can possibly know the answers ahead of time, or how each decision, event, and outcome would interact to produce a future we could never anticipate. Yet policymakers must decide and make choices in the face of radical uncertainty that may involve precious blood and treasure. They are correctly held accountable and can lose their careers and their reputations if they are wrong. Many would be grateful for serious help from the ivory tower, a sense of what the past might tell us, insightful and nuanced analysis that might reveal a way of understanding things that had never occurred to overstressed policymakers trying to make sense of things.[71] Instead they open their *Foreign Affairs* to find a primer from Kenneth Waltz entitled 'Why Iran Should have the Bomb,' offering selective history, contradictory reasoning, and the pedantic tone of the wise professor chastising child-like policymakers.[72]

Does this mean Sagan 'wins' the debate? There is no doubt that his argument is far more nuanced, interesting, and sensitive to history. But it has its own problems. Waltz is right to reign in Sagan's alarmism, particularly on the over-hyped fear of nuclear terrorism. Sagan puts too much stock in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which is only one tool in the American spectrum of inhibition while he underplays the importance of coercive measures and even nuclear umbrellas, which requires the United States do things to extend deterrence (eschew no-first use, explore missile defense, seek primacy) that make Sagan uncomfortable. One would have been grateful if he had examined the unusual cases; for example, Italy's outrage over the NPT, which incited a rancorous internal debate and incited pressure to initiate a weapons program in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[73] Also, Sagan's focus on safety implies the problem is less the spread of nuclear weapons than constructing safe, effective organizations and procedures to manage them. One has to ask – if the United States developed and exported a nearly perfect way to protect and store nuclear weapons, would that solve the problem of nuclear spread? In policy terms, should

and the Bomb (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security 2012), <www.cnas.org/riskandrivalry>.

[71]For a discussion of the challenges decision-makers face weighing risks in the face of radical uncertainty, and lamenting how rarely academics capture these factors, see Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg, 'Mind the Gap: Why Policymakers and Scholars Ignore Each Other, and What Should be Done About It,' *Carnegie Reporter* 6/4 (Spring 2012), <http://carnegie.org/publications/carnegie-reporter/single/view/article/item/308/>.

[72]Kenneth Waltz, 'Why Iran Should Get the Bomb', *Foreign Affairs* 91/4 (July/Aug. 2012), 2–5.

[73]I am grateful to Leopoldo Nuti to explaining this fascinating story to me.

we spend our political capital working to ensure better safety among nuclear aspirants, despite moral hazard concerns?

The real problem, however, is that Sagan plays small ball in his debate with Waltz, conceding the big issues. Why not challenge Waltz on his core arguments about deterrence and stability? Yes, policy-makers care about organizational mistakes and inadvertent escalation. But what they understand more is that nuclear weapons can transform crises into tests of will and battles of resolve that is much different than crises involving only conventional weapons. The most effective policies must try to understand the differential interests of states jockeying for power and security in ways classical realists would grasp but Waltz's one-size-fits all approach and Sagan's organizational focus (which bypasses state interests) largely ignore.

More is at stake here than who wins an academic debate. At a time when academics, particularly those who study national and international security, are trying to find ways to more effectively bridge the gap between scholarship and policy, the fact that the franchise is so influential within the academy and has so little impact among decision-makers is revealing. Waltz recommends policies that have no chance of being treated seriously, to say nothing of being adopted, all while chastising the policies of a country that has weathered the nuclear age by defeating its rival *without* using these weapons. US leaders have made mistakes, to be sure, but if you had told a serious person in 1960 – Waltz included – that by 2012 the United States would have no peer military rivals, communism was all but dead, Germany was reunified, non-nuclear and peaceful, Japan was docile, the number of nuclear states was in the single digits, and the possibility of great power war was lower than at any time since the creation of the Westphalian state system, they would have said you were nuts. Waltz, the great theorist, predicted none of this, nor would these events have happened if the United States had followed the advice of Waltz the great moralist. US national security figures must have been doing something right. It is no wonder his arguments are not taken seriously, which would be fine if not for the fact he is touted to those in positions of responsibility as the father of international relations theory and the most important thinker on war and peace that political science has produced since 1945. As Sagan (but apparently not Waltz) surely knows, there is important and compelling work being done – by both political scientists and historians – in strategic studies on the nuclear question. But unless a greater effort is made to demonstrate the field understands and empathizes with the concerns of those who make these terrible, stressful policies under extraordinary pressures, this work may be dismissed as not serious. And no one – not the scholar trying to make

a difference, nor the policymaker trying to make difficult decisions in an environment of complex uncertainty – would benefit from that.

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