

Reason behind armed race essay sample

War



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Arms race is a global phenomenon that cannot easily be deterred. If during the Cold War the major participants of the arms race were just US and the Soviet Union (with Great Britain and France just at the side but still considered as nuclear powers during that era), well now, Asia and the Middle East are joining the competition. Back then the U. S. had about 24, 000 operationally deployed nuclear weapons and Russia had nearly 2, 500. Compare that to today's situation where US now only has 1, 980 deployed nuclear weapons, and Russia has between 4, 537 and 6, 537. India, Pakistan, UK, France and Israel have 1 to 400 each, and China may have something between 200 to more than 1, 000 (Sokolski, 2012). It can clearly be seen that US's dominance with regard to arms proliferation has decreased in the modern times and Russia is now leading in this race with other states just following after the US. But what made these other countries follow the footsteps of the major players during the Cold War? To put it simply, what made them join this inexorable arms race? Is it because of the fear and threat that comes with the arms proliferation of other countries or are there other factors that contribute to this competition? This paper aims to answer these questions and present a deeper understanding of arms race and its causes through theories and analyzing the issue through different perspectives.

I. Definition: What is Arms Race?

The term “ arms race” has a lot of definitions, but for this paper a broad and inclusive definition will be more fitting. According to Kydd (2000) “ Arms race is a situation in which two or more states involved in a conflictual relationship compete with each other over the strength of their armed

forces.” This conflictual relationship may be an effect of disagreements regarding various issues, misunderstandings or mutual fears. The competition has two aspects, quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative aspect pertains to the size of the armed forces while the qualitative refers to the technological features of weapons or the strategic competence of the troops (Huntington, 1958, as cited by Kydd, 2000).

II. Theoretical Explanations: Why is this happening?

This paper will first discuss a traditional perspective on arms race presented by Andrew Kydd (2000) and this is represented by the three principle theories that were developed by the post – World War II American Social Science. These are the Repeated Prisoner’s Dilemma (RPD), the spiral model, and the deterrence model. According to the RPD, arms races are perceived as repeated games in which a non-cooperative equilibrium represents the arms race while a cooperative equilibrium involving strategies based on trade off, such as Tit – for – tat or retaliation represents arms control (Axelrod, 1984 as cited by Kydd, 2000). This model simply suggests that one state thinks that non-cooperation (i. e. increasing arms proliferation) is more beneficial and so it chooses this option not knowing that other states have this sort of thinking as well, making it a Prisoner’s Dilemma. It’s a situation where one agent thinks it is gaining the upper hand by cheating when in reality both parties are becoming worse off. In other words, one state increases its arms, thinking having more arms gets them the upper hand in the situation for they believe the other states are following the rules of arms control when in fact they are doing the same thing and are unwittingly increasing their arms as well. This sort of logic is not adhering to the concept

of future payoff or long-term results. If states think far ahead they would see the disadvantageous results of this type of behavior.

All of them are just increasing their arms and are consequently participating in an arms race. Then how can this be resolved? By resisting the urge of giving in to the short term goal of getting the upper hand (through arms proliferation) in this situation they will achieve a cooperative equilibrium where everyone is adhering to the rules of arms control to prevent arms race and its consequences like unnecessary military expenditures. The spiral model on the other hand treats arms race as a result of mutual fear that pushes countries to increase their weaponry and defense at such high levels which can lead to a preemptive or preventive war (Jervis, 1976, as cited by Kydd, 2000). Basically this model says the fear of a country for its security can lead to arms race. One or more states think that there is this revolutionist state or group of states that wants to reverse the status quo. And because of this fear they increase their arms acquisition. But the other state or group of states is thinking the same thing and so they increase their arms proliferation as well. This is a scenario where a spiral of fear is formed resulting to an arms race that can also lead to a preemptive or preventive war. These two theories became the basis for creating the arms control theory which was founded in the 1960's.

This theory believes that cooperation can be achieved – even though states have their own differences – and this is through regulating the acquisition of arms of different states (Schelling and Halperin, 1961, as cited by Kydd). The main goals of arms control are, to prevent war from happening, to reduce the expenditures of war if it does happen and reduce the cost of preparing

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for war which is arms race. According to the Spiral Model, a preemptive war may happen if the spiral of fear cannot be stopped and so this model supports arms control because it states that there is war that is about to happen and to stop that arms control must be imposed. Another reason why this model supports the arms control theory is that, limiting weaponry will prevent the possibility of a first strike – due to fear – to happen. Therefore, arms control limits the incentive to make the first attack that results from the fear of being the one to be attacked first. Now, regarding the third goal, which is the cost of preparing for war, this is substantiated by the RPD model because the reduction of military expenditures may help with achieving the cooperative equilibrium. If states agree that the cost of engaging in an arms race is far too high then an imposition of arms control may happen.

What these two theories point out then is that cooperation among different states is in fact possible and through arms control, the preparation for war or arms race and war itself can be prevented. The deterrence model however contradicts these two theories and the idea or feasibility of arms control. This model suggests that arms race is a symptom of an existing conflict among states based on political differences or jarring interests. Just like the spiral model this model also says that there are aggressive states that wish to reverse the

status quo. But unlike the spiral model that supports arms control and sees this as the solution to the problem, deterrence model says otherwise. For this theory, these revolutionist states must be prevented from overturning the status quo by continuously increasing the arms proliferation of the leading states. This model sees arms race as a power struggle. If the

revolutionist states are acquiring more arms, then the leading states consider this as a challenge to their autonomy and would therefore increase their arms as well to make sure the status quo is maintained. Now, how does this model contradict the idea of arms control?

Well because this model says arms race is a symptom of an existing conflict among states, then as long as this conflict exists, arms control cannot be imposed since the states are not cooperating with each other. Gray's (1992, as cited by Kydd, 2000) work subtitled: " Why Arms Control Must Fail" shows the paradoxical idea of arms control, " it is impossible to achieve when needed, when relations of states are bad and irrelevant when it is possible, when relations are good." Basically, this says having an arms control when all states are in conflict is impossible but it is the time when the states need it most because this is the time when a war might happen, and when the states are actually in mutual agreement this is the time when an arms control is possible to be implemented but is also irrelevant. This shows that the point of an arms control is moot (Kydd, 2000).

The next that will be discussed is Toby J. Rider's (2009) perspective on arms race. He first discussed arms race through the lens of traditional International Relations just like Kydd (2000). Traditional International relations sees arms race as a natural reaction of states whose territories are threatened and that this has long-term and short-term economic consequences and this could also lead to tensions among states that could lead to political conflicts (Rider, 2009). He also examined the relationship of arms race, threat and competition over territory in the context of rivalry. His

analysis has revealed that although arms race is a reaction to threat, it is mostly a response to territorial threat.

Vasquez (1993, as cited by Rider, 2009) suggests that arms race is a reaction to the perception of threat, most probably a threat to territory, and this sort of reaction is referred to as a power politics strategy. Rider's point here is that, if arms race is a response to the perception of threat, this response should be based on a salient enough threat. And for him a threat to a state's territory is enough of a threat to warrant a call to arms proliferation. Continuing his discussion, he proceeded to traditional theories regarding arms race. He mentioned a line of thought pertaining to the deterrence model, that the arms proliferation of a state should be met with proliferating arms as well so as to prevent their potential aggression (Morgenthau, 1985, as cited by Rider, 2009). He also mentioned the spiral model, which was also discussed by Kydd (2000). States engaging in an arms race are further spreading the threat and fear by continuously proliferating arms and forming a spiral of fear that may lead to military conflicts among states (Jervis, 1976, as cited by Rider, 2009). From this reasoning, it is to be expected that states engaging in arms race may consequently result to war. Rider then poses a question. Why would states engage in such an act that would threaten their security and would only lead to military conflicts?

Primarily arms races are perceived as an action-reaction process set-off by real or perceived external threats (Buzan and Herring 1998, as cited by Rider, 2009). An example would be if state A perceives state B as a threat to its security then state A would increase its armed forces. State B then, after seeing that state A increased the strength of its military would do the same.

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Therefore, if states are survival-minded and if it is considered that all threats are equal in salience or validity then it is likely that they would increase the strength of their military just to be safe and this would of course lead to an arms race. He then discusses another line of reasoning and this includes states knowing the consequences of engaging in such a race as a factor. From this line of thought, it is reasonable then that states would not easily engage in arms race if its consequences are dire. Following this logic, responding to threat through arms race only happens if the threat is salient or valid. Now for Rider (2009), a salient threat that states would most probably react to by engaging in arms race is territorial threat. He then explained the salience of territorial threats through the three categories Vasquez (1993) and Hensel (2008) outlined: tangible, intangible and reputation. The tangible category of territorial threat mostly pertains to the natural resources of the territory or the geography or land mass itself.

Basically, the richness of the land would be a valid reason for a state to protect its territory and this would mainly relate to the economic value of their land. The Intangible aspect however pertains to the historical, political or cultural value of a territory going beyond its economic potential. So if a group of people has an ethno-cultural attachment to a territory then there is of course a possibility that they will protect that territory and would consider a territorial threat salient. And the last reason why a territorial threat is salient is reputation. If your state does not have a firm or resolute reputation, this may put the security of your state at risk. To put it simply if other states think you don't have the capacity to defend your claim to territories, the risk of being attacked will be heightened. His conclusion basically points

out that stakes should be considered in responding to threats. A state cannot simply react to perceived or real threats and must think about the consequences of their actions. And engaging in an arms race does have a lot of risks that states should consider. Therefore arbitrary engagement in arms race is unreasonable and the traditional models for arms race theory haven't really dealt with the factor of stakes. And lastly for him territorial threat is the most valid or salient type of threat that can be responded to with arms proliferation.

Next, this paper will discuss another International relations approach to arms race but in the extraterrestrial domain which was originally tackled by Gregory J. Moore (2011). The two countries that are mainly involved in this discussion are US and China. Moore started off his discussion with a statement made by Everett Dolman. "Who controls low-earth orbit controls near-earth space. Who controls near-earth space dominates Terra [earth and atmosphere]. Who dominates Terra dominates humankind...The United States is the morally superior choice to seize and control space". Arms race on its own is a complex social phenomenon and currently it is just something terrestrial or within this earth and to make it a celestial phenomenon would just make it a more intricate issue. But as of now, according to most experts, the space has not yet been weaponized (O'Hanlon, 2004; Moltz, 2008, as cited by Moore, 2011) and there are still no weapons located in space whether those of China or the US. Moore is questioning how long this situation will last. How long before these superpowers start an extraterrestrial arms race? Moore attacked this discussion through an

International Relations approach following the theoretical pattern of this review of literature.

He then continued his discussion by mentioning China's emergence as a superpower and its implications to celestial arms race. China has now beaten Japan economically but it is still far from the US's economic prowess if looked at through GDP per capita. When it comes to space exploration though it became the third country in 2003 to field a manned space flight only after US and Russia and the fourth in 2007(only after US, Russia and Japan) to put a probe in orbit around the moon. China is now also working on a manned mission to the moon that is planned to take place in 2017 (Moore, 2011). He then explained the complexities of having an arms race in space. If there was to have an arms race in space between China and the US, it would be greatly difficult for China to catch up because the space is dominated by US assets or satellites and if it does try to catch up, surely the world will notice this immediately. Then there are also the many differences of having a space arms race compared to a terrestrial or local arms race. First, because there are so many US assets or satellites in space, the first country that will be greatly affected by an extraterrestrial war would be the US. Second protecting space assets is highly difficult because there are no watchdogs, security guards, or high barbed wire fences in space.

The US space assets are greatly vulnerable to sabotage, hacking and general attacks. Third, if China wants to join the space arms race, it could quickly become a super power because space domination is a phenomenon that is still relatively new and leap-frogging from a non-participant to a space arms race super power is actually feasible. Finally, China would not want to be left

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behind in this field, that being proven by its efforts to join space exploration. Now a good point that Joan Johnson-Freese (2007, as cited by Moore, 2011) has identified is 95 percent of space technology may have dual purposes (civilian and military). Of course nations would justify their advancement in space technology by saying it's for civilian purposes (e. g. the use of GPS) when in fact it could be for military purposes. China may not really want to dominate the extraterrestrial arena but if the US follows Dolman's advice to seize the space then China might treat this as an aggressive stance and may retaliate by engaging in space arms race.

He then analyzed the issue in an International Relations perspective. He first mentioned Lauren Grego's concern that there is no international mechanism governing the interaction and problems in space like space debris and unintentional interference of nations' space assets. According to her this needs to be addressed and a solution she is suggesting is for nations to move forward with the European Union Code of Conduct in Space or a more inclusive alternative that would regulate and govern the extraterrestrial domain. Shenyang Chen sides with Grego and says that there is a need to address and mitigate these problems and even made a name for it: International Space Management Organization. Basically the article talked about the possibilities of having a SINO-US space arms race and the problems it would entail and how this can be resolved through international governance of the space. He then concluded with a more theoretical approach to this issue. He presented three IR (International Relations) theories that can be used to discuss this issue, realism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism. First from the perspective of realism

(Mearsheimer, 2001, as cited by Moore, 2011), there is little hope in avoiding extraterrestrial arms race.

Just like what have been discussed earlier, the US may want to dominate the space and if this happens of course China won't back down and would take this as a challenge. Next, from a neo-liberal institutionalist perspective (Keohane, 2005; Doyle, 2011, as cited by Moore, 2011), because China and the US have a financial interdependence this may help preventing the imminent political conflict that may arise but their ideological differences, mainly China being communist and America being democratic, tensions may continue and might lead to an actual conflict. Lastly, from the constructivist perspective (Wendt, 1995, as cited by Moore, 2011), two things need to be pointed out. First is the ability of the countries to prevent materialism determinism. Because it is undeniable that China is an emerging economy, it can then be inferred that their economic growth might lead to their desire to engage in space arms race because they have the economic capacity. If this happened the US then will retaliate by engaging in the space arms race as well just so it could contain China. So if these two countries will not look at this materialistic aspect of this situation then they could prevent a space arms race. Second, is that these two countries need to build trust and social capital.

They need to recognize the different interests of each other and to construct institutions and norms that will help in solidifying this agreement.

Consequently, because arms races are socially constructed and are not natural phenomena, these are subjected to the interests and agency of humans. And so from a constructivist perspective, it can be said that arms

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race may be avoided. Moore further emphasized that constructivism is the best framework to use in analyzing the Sino-US relationship. According to Wendt's (1995) principle of constructivism "the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces". This greatly criticizes the materialistic perspective on this issue that just because China and the US are both economically capable in engaging in an arms race they will in fact eventually engage in one. This is the problem with the realist and the neo-liberal institutionalist perspectives. They're both in the materialistic line of thought. To quote the materialistic view of Thucydides, "the strong [or in this case the technologically able] will do what they can, and the weak [or technologically challenged] will accept what they must."

Constructivism's counter argument to this Thucydian saying is "Yes, that is often true, not because it need be that way, but because the actors involved believe it needs to be that way." In other words, if China and the US both believe that just because the other state has the capabilities to weaponize the space, then it should engage in a space arms race just to mitigate the growing autonomy of the other state in the extraterrestrial domain. This is linked to Wendt's (1995) second principle of constructivism, "that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature". To put it simply, interests are not natural. They are socially constructed. If both China and the US would decide that it is for their best interests to deploy space armaments thinking this is also the other state's plan, then this is what is going to happen. But if they realize that initializing the space weaponization would result to a space arms race

that would be disadvantageous to both countries and would not be for their best interests, then space arms race will not happen. It can then truly be seen that the issue can efficiently be analyzed through the lens of constructivism.

The next literature that will be discussed here is Gawdat Bahgat's (2011) essay in Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East. According to this study, Iran is being accused, by the US and many European Countries, of making nuclear weapons or attempting to make them and so these countries and the UN gave Iran economic sanctions so as to stop its uranium enrichment. Diplomatic negotiations however have failed to achieve an agreement. This essay basically talks about the effects of Iran enhancing its nuclear energy to other countries especially the countries within its region. Since the mid-2000's several Middle Eastern states have declared that they will establish peaceful nuclear power programs mostly concerned with the civilian purpose of nuclear energy. Included in the list are Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It isn't sure whether all of these declarations will be actualized, but what is clear is that this growing interest in getting involved in nuclear programs is a response to Iran's nuclear enhancement program.

Now, even though these proposals claim to only engage in nuclear programs for civilian purposes, the line between civilian and military purposes regarding nuclear energy is still greatly blurred. And so, these proposals are seen as a sign of a budding nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Bahgat however contradicts this assumption. An Iran with nuclear capability would

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further destabilize the Middle East. But this won't trigger a nuclear arms race. This is a necessary reason to trigger an arms race but it is not a sufficient one. He then discussed several theoretical perspectives that can be used to analyze the issue. For him, the decision to go nuclear is a complex one and cannot be explained through just one model and would need a bunch of them to reach a holistic and deep understanding. First are the Leadership/cognitive and psychological approaches: Any attempt to understand nuclear proliferation should take into consideration the perceptions and beliefs of policy makers. A critique of these approaches is that these leadership/cognitive factors are difficult to quantify and can provide only limited explanations as to how nuclear proliferation happens.

Next are the Internal dynamics and domestic politics model: According to this model, in order to explain the reason why decisions to go nuclear are made, the state should not be seen as a rational or unitary unit. Instead, this model argues that the decision to go nuclear is made by the collective decision of bureaucratic interests or parochial priorities. A critique of this model however is, it underestimates the impact and influence of regional and international relations or dynamics. Another is National Pride and Prestige: Now there are some cases where decisions of nations cannot purely be analyzed in a detached and cold manner and would have to look at subjective reasons of nations' behaviors.

Non-material factors such as the desire to gain the respect of other states and to get high status can influence in the decision making process of states. A critique of this model is international norms change. So for now if arms proliferation is the trend, then maybe in the next term those who are

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engaging in arms race or arms acquisition will be treated as pariahs. The status of respect is highly subjective and temporal. Lastly, security: Great examples for this are the Arab-Israeli conflict and instability in the Persian Gulf have influenced neighboring Middle Eastern countries to gain nuclear capabilities due to fear for their security. Most literatures regarding arms proliferation are greatly linked to security issues. Survival-minded states would engage in nuclear proliferation to ensure the integrity of their defense. He then concluded that there is no single model that can explain why countries choose to do nuclear proliferation and why they don't.

III. Synthesis: Similar and Contradicting Arguments

Now to synthesize the different arguments, this paper will categorize the various points of the different literatures. To start off, this paper will discuss Kydd (2000) and Rider's (2011) arguments which are both in the traditional perspectives. Kydd focused on three and these are the Repeated Prisoner's Dilemma (RPD), spiral model and deterrence model. A closer look at these models will make one realize that these are all following the trend of Rational Choice Theory. These three represent a very individualistic perspective on arms race. They look at the agents as utility – maximizers who only look at self-interests and not the interest of the whole group. So, rational decision is achieved individually, but irrational decision is made collectively (Hay, 2002). One state will increase its arms to protect itself, not realizing that this is what the other states are doing, so everyone becomes worse off because they end up engaging in an unwanted arms race due to fear or protection of autonomy.

Now, in Rider's discussion, he mentioned the spiral and deterrence models as well. He said that through these models we look at arms race as a natural reaction of states, still following the rationalist perspective, portraying agents as utility – maximizers. So their rational reaction to threat is perceived as something natural. But he then posed a question that will critique the traditionalist perspective. If the states know that engaging in arms race would have a lot of consequences, whether it be economic, (e. g. spending too much on military expenditures that may lead to economic decline) or military (e. g. initiating an actual war), why then would they participate in this competition in the first place? This is where he has put the idea of stakes or the risks that states would take in engaging in arms race. Of course, every threat has its level of gravity or what Rider has called its salience. If a threat is salient enough, then responding to it, even though the state knows the risks, is a reasonable action. And for him, a salient threat is territorial threat.

He then explained why territorial threat is salient through three categories: tangible, intangible and reputation. If we look at it more closely, these three categories can be further divided into two, through the materialistic and idealistic lenses. Of course the tangible aspect of territory falls under the materialistic perspective, for this mainly pertains to the economic value of the territory. The intangible aspect on the other hand, of course, falls under the idealistic perspective. These are the historical, political and cultural values that states uphold relating to their territory. And lastly, reputation can also be categorized under idealism because it looks at the perception of the world regarding the status of the state in relation to protecting its territory.

Now moving on to Moore's (2011) discussion of the Sino-US relationship and the possibility of them engaging in a space arms race, he used three theories to discuss the issue, these are realism, neo-liberal institutionalism and constructivism. He first discussed the issue using the realist perspective.

Now, it was mentioned earlier that both the realist and the neo-liberal institutionalist perspectives were following the trend of materialism. This then would make constructivism follow the concept of idealism. It was emphasized by Wendt (1995) that the structure of human interaction is mainly influenced by shared ideas rather than material forces. This supports the idea that constructivism is under idealism. Another thing to point out here is that Wendt's constructivism contradicts the essentialism of the rational choice theories of arms race, because his second principle points out that interests are socially constructed and therefore the decision to engage in an arms race is not a natural reaction but a socially constructed one. Then the last literature that was discussed was by Bahgat. His essay was on the Nuclear Arms Race on the Middle East and its implications to the countries within that region. He discussed this issue using several models Leadership/cognitive and psychological approaches, internal dynamics and domestic politics model, National Pride and prestige and lastly security. The first three models are linked to idealism, because all three used beliefs, interests and perceptions as bases for decision making in arms race. The Security model on the other hand falls under the category of an essentialist perspective since it is linked to the rational choice theories of arms, mainly because the model says that states are survival - minded and would use utility - maximization in order to achieve security.

IV. Conclusion

To conclude this paper, an explanation as to why further categorization has been made regarding all of these theories has to be presented. From reviewing all of these literatures, a pattern can be noticed. All of the rational choice theories regarding arms race (i. e. RPD, spiral model, deterrence model) are implying an essentialist perspective because they perceive the decision to engage in arms race as something natural to the agents or states. Add to this the security model that is also rationalist in thinking for its portrayal of states as survival-minded and utility-maximizers. Then the counter argument for this is constructivism which states that ideas, beliefs and interests are socially constructed and so the decision to engage in arms race is socially constructed as well and not innate. Now, another dichotomization regarding these theories can be made through the lenses of materialism and idealism.

The first example was the three aspects of territory with the tangible aspect as materialistic and the two other aspects, intangible and reputation as idealistic. Next, the dichotomization was used in the three theories used by Moore. Realism and neo-liberal institutionalism were both put under materialism and constructivism was under idealism. Lastly, the four models of Bahgat's essay were categorized using idealism, with the first three falling under it (i. e. leadership/cognitive and psychological approaches, internal dynamics and domestic politics model, national pride and prestige) and essentialism, with the security model being put under this theory. Basically, the issue of why states engage in arms races can be viewed through two sets of debating theories, Essentialism/Constructivism and

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Materialism/Idealism. Through the categorization of the various theories, analyzing the issue of arms race may become less complex.

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