

Case studies  
analysing of the  
domestic politics  
model politics essay



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\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [The case of India- Best supports the model:](#) \n \t
2. [Ukraine: A challenge to the ' domestic politics' model](#) \n \t
3. [Conclusion](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

The Domestic Politics model suggests that the decision of a state to proliferate or disarm is influenced by domestic dynamics within a state- it serves popular bureaucratic beliefs, political interests and political competition within a state. Scott Sagan identifies three main actors influencing the nation's proliferation decision- the nuclear energy establishment of the country, military as a bureaucratic actor and political bureaucracy taking decisions favouring their stance in the country.

This paper studies Nuclear Weapons decisions only of two countries- India's case to support the domestic politics model and Ukraine's disarmament as a case that challenges this model.

### **The case of India- Best supports the model:**

India's decision to join the nuclear club is by far best supports the ' domestic politics' model challenging the realist explanations of the security dilemma. After the Chinese nuclear test in 1964, there were more political differences in India more than security concerns. The 1974 Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) and the 1998 nuclear tests are both attributed to internal politics.

Role of the Nuclear Energy Establishment -

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One of the actors in this model is the states nuclear establishment signifying the role of the scientific-military-establishment of the country. ' The initial ideas for individual weapons innovations are often developed inside state laboratories, where scientists favour military innovations simply because it is technically exciting and keeps money and prestige flowing to their laboratories.'[1]This acts as a pro-weapon group whose role is significant in persistently lobbying the government to develop weapons by changing perceptions about the costs and benefits of the weapons. Around the mid-1960's, the then prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri clearly was against India becoming a nuclear country even after China's nuclear tests. This was partly because of his Gandhian principles and mainly because it was not feasible economically. Simultaneously, Homi Bhabha, the head of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and the founder of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) lobbied the government for the establishment of a nuclear arsenal. He also suggested that the costs were remarkable lesser than what was understood by Shastri by estimating that ' a stockpile of 50 atomic bombs would cost only \$21 million, while 50 megaton hydrogen bombs would be \$ 31. 5 million concluding that atomic bomb would be cheaper than the TNT required to produce a comparable explosion.'[2]This did not include the cost of construction of plants, labour and cost of bringing expertise from other projects within India. Bhabha also suggested that only nuclear weapons could give India a strong deterrence power against strong states. Bhabha was also lured by this prospect and continued research on nuclear weapons. After Bhabha's death in 1966, nuclear physicists working with him inherited his ambitions but were unable to pursue it due to Bhabha's successor- Vikram Sarabhai's opposition to nuclear explosives.[3]It was only after <https://assignbuster.com/case-studies-analysing-of-the-domestic-politics-model-politics-essay/>

Sarabhai's death in 1971, the pro-bomb scientists got a free-hand in lobbying Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in advocating a nuclear test.

Domestic problems and the nuclear decision-

Politicians in states that favour nuclear weapons acquisition can directly or indirectly affect the decision making process. The model further suggests that nuclear proliferation decisions are at times an act of diverting attention from rough internal turbulences within the state and to gain public support. This is a clear explanation of the 1974 PNE. Though the BARC had been lobbying for a nuclear test for a long time, Indira Gandhi was ready to give in to the appeals only in 1974 not because of the claimed insecurities but because Gandhi's power had almost reached its rock bottom by then. Her policies were evidently failing with India tumbling into an imported inflation after the sudden increase in oil prices resulting in protests across the country, huge strikes by labour union, railway workers and government employees. Furthermore, criticisms from within the Congress party challenged her dangerously suggesting that she was unable to control the situation in an obstinate federal state. It became evident to her that at this point she had to divert talks from existing political unrest and gain support- a successful nuclear explosion seemed to do the trick. In addition, the way the test was conducted showed that there was an absence of other possible reasons and it was purely an impulsive decision taken by the Prime Minister with no changes made to the nuclear military doctrine of India. Senior Defense and Foreign Affairs officials, the military services and the Defense Minister were not involved in the initial decision making process. The decision-making pattern suggests that this was purely a political decision

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with the absence of any other model that could sufficiently explain this. This does indeed explain the 'rally around the flag' effect that Gandhi expected as it increased her popularity after the tests.

#### Political bureaucracies-

Political bureaucracies in India seemed to be in different opinions while the Shastri was against the nuclear bomb. Major parties in India opposed the then government's policies. The Bharathiya Jana Sangh (BJP in future) on the right demanded a nuclear deterrent for India while the Swatantra Party conceded with the decision of the Congress. In the left, 'the Samyukta Socialists Party (SSP) and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) favoured a nuclear capability for India, oddly enough in basic agreement with the rightist JS.'

[4]The Janatha Sangh constantly thrashed the government's decisions for a long time forcing the congress to reassess and re-evaluate the nuclear weapons option. As Sagan rightly puts it, bureaucracies usually make their stance by exaggerating a security problem to alter the frame of decision making- every party or leader who was in favour of nuclear weapons suggested that it was for security reasons. However, this did not hold good until Indira Gandhi came to power after Shastri. Her decision to give a green signal to the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion of the 1974 was mainly to gain support from the constitutional allies and other silence criticisms from other domestic parties. This can be further explained by the hindu nationalistic BJP's decision to test 5 nuclear bombs in 1998. 'The appeal of scientific progress and jingoistic (nuclear nationalism) tremendously increased the popularity and hence stability of the eighteen-party fragile coalition government headed by the BJP.'

[5]This was timely and was seen as a

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necessity by the BJP which had newly come into power just two months before the tests in 1998 to solidify the unstable government.

Furthermore, applying a reverse understanding of this issue, it is clear that there was an absence of other strong explanations. Let us consider the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion in 1974- the war against Pakistan in 1971 had ended with India's victory, it was claimed that there was an increasing threat from China but there was no overt threat from China, the proliferation decision was not even a decision in response to China's nuclear test. There was no eminent security concern at that particular point of time ruling out the security dilemma. These, in context to the happenings within bureaucracies in New Delhi suggest that the Domestic Politics model best explains India's decision to go nuclear.

### **Ukraine: A challenge to the 'domestic politics' model**

Scott Sagan argues that nuclear weapons decisions always work in the favour of strong domestic

actors, in particular from the military, scientific actors and the politicians. To challenge this model there need to be two variables- 1) a strong pro-nuclear political lobby and support 2) this very domestic politics failing to affect the final decision as the decision was made due to other models that can be more pressing. Ukraine is a good case as it exhibits both patterns very clearly. This is an analysis of how Ukraine challenges the Domestic Politics model because it was the dominant opinion that Ukraine should retain nuclear weapons yet the decision was to disarm due to other reasons like Security, Economics and International Norms.

Ukraine is 'born nuclear' that had the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world after its independence in 1991. In 1994 after three years of contemplating and adjourning, Ukraine abandoned its nuclear weapons. 'This disarmament decision is also puzzling from a traditional domestic politics perspective.' [6]

The dominant public opinion was to retain nuclear weapons. People were deeply insecure and suspicious of Russian intentions. 'Despite the tragic consequences of the Chernobyl accident, public opinion polls in Ukraine showed rapidly growing support for keeping nuclear weapons in 1992 and 1993: polls showed support for an independent arsenal increasing from 18 percent in May 1992 to 36 percent in March 1993, to as much as 45 percent in Summer 1993.' [7] Ukraine's leadership faced severe criticism from the local political groups as well mainly the nationalists arguing that the nuclear arsenal protected their independence and security. Some even went as far as criticising President Leonid Kravchuk for letting down the nation and its national interests. Many military officials including the well known retired Rada member General Volodymyr Tolubko, senior political officers and the elite persistently lobbied to retain nuclear weapons as it could be used for the purpose of deterrence. 'The National Conservative Party, which exercised considerable power in the Rada and leverage over President Kravchuk, argued that Ukraine must be a full member of the nuclear club.' [8] However, in 1994 Ukraine abandoned all its nuclear weapons joining the NPT.

What then is the best explanatory model?

The Ukrainian decision to disarm challenges clearly challenges the Domestic Politics model and in fact there are other models that explain this decision better.

The economics model- Providing maintenance for nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles were understood to be a huge economic burden on the newly independent country on a long-run. ' A related issue was the realization that retaining nuclear weapons would exacerbate Ukraine's economic plight because the United States and Europe would withhold economic assistance until Ukraine relinquished those forces.' [9] Ukraine might also have to divert funds from its internal development to maintenance of nuclear weapons hereby making the state more financially weak.

Security concerns- The US also placed immense pressure on Ukraine to relinquish their weapons by bringing to surface the facts about how nuclear weapons are not dependable. The Clinton administration also eased their insecurity by promising diplomatic support if there should be a threat from Russia. This shows that security was a major reason in abandoning weapons. Ukraine realised that the centre of the insecurity debate regarding threats pre-emptive threats from Russia were the nuclear arsenals.

The international norms model- Ukraine wanted to be accepted by the world as a responsible independent state as the NPT created a trend where new nuclear states were called " rogue states". Kiev also realised that retaining Russia's and the ' west' support at the same time was impossible. The need for a good image and stature was predominant in all their decisions; Ukraine



got a taste of international stature after signing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 1992 and the Lisbon Protocol.

## **Conclusion**

To sum it up, it is evident that Ukrainian case challenges the domestic politics model as it has strong undertones of other factors and dominant opinion and political lobbying does not hold good to influence the decision of disarmament. ' The costs of continued armament-including strategic vulnerability, economic privation, and diplomatic isolation-were oppressively high. Retaining nuclear weapons would have invited attack, sanctions, pariah status or abandonment by their allies; giving them up meant security and economic investment.' [10] It must be said however that in the case of nuclear proliferation and disarmament, any case would show a culmination of various models. This paper only suggests that off all cases India best explains the domestic politics model and Ukraine least explains it.