

Nuclear proliferation:
if more states acquire
nuclear weapons, will
the world be ...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Identification and of the Debate Kenneth Waltz's Peace, Stability and Nuclear Weapons and Scott Sagan's The Perils of Proliferation in South Asia both detail the discussion of how best to assess the proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially in regimes that are emerging, unstable, or "third-world." While some political scientists see nuclear weapons as a threat to stability and peace because of mass destruction capability and the potential for horrific fallout from geographic, ethnic, and political instability, others see those weapons as the very power resources that can maintain a proper balance of power between regimes at times of tension, cold conflict, and low level conventional battles. The importance of this debate in international relations is three-fold. First, nuclear weapons have devastating power and their use would preclude any theoretical or practical discussions of prospective diplomacy. Second, possession of nuclear weapons, in conjunction with other factors, makes various statements about the strategies of independent nations. Finally, nuclear weapons may determine the future balance of world power.

Description of the Competing Perspectives

The viewpoints in this debate surround nuclear proliferation. Waltz says that nuclear weapons keep the world safe by preventing preemptive (preventive) war and creating second-strike inspired deterrence; he also discounts the possibility of accidental nuclear crises. Waltz also addresses the concept of US handicapping in international control (the option of US invasion). Sagan states that preventive war is likely, second-strike-based deterrence is flawed because of technical issues, and accidents are probable. Both sides also briefly address terrorism. With the exception of this last point, I will detail each of these points one at a time in the middle

section of this paper, starting with those of Waltz (terrorism will be left for the end). Waltz claims that the idea of a small nation wishing to gain nuclear weapons is “ as odd as it is pervasive” (6). His examples of this include the behavior of Libya, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and a few other mostly Middle Eastern countries. In the interest of space, I will address only a few of these references. In reference to the possibility of risking losses in retaliation, Waltz (7), states, “ Rulers want to have a country that they can continue to rule.” In other words, dictators would be unlikely to launch a first strike because of the threat of deterrence. Specifically referencing North Korea, Waltz (8) states, “ Any war on the peninsula would put North Korea at severe risk.” Sagan (1067), however, believes that military commanders favor preventive war and are likely to use it because they see war as inevitable, naturally favor strategic offense, and are less likely than civilians to focus on disincentives. As a real-world example, he describes the actions of India toward Pakistan in the Brasstacks crisis (1070), claiming that Indian military leaders intentionally performed provocative war exercises in hopes that Pakistan would engage in conflict with them. As for second strike deterrence, Waltz (9) states that there are two necessities: survival of a first attack and the ability to inflict sufficient damage. Without absolute certainty of destruction of the opposition’s arsenal, a country would be less likely to attack (9, 10). Because of uncertainty of a country’s arsenal size, nations are unwilling to take the risk of retaliation; “ Even the largest states recoil from taking adventurous steps if the price of failure is the possible loss of a city or two” (10). The problem that Sagan sees with this position is that nations may sometimes “ benefit” from spotting strategic “ signatures” left by

carelessness in military procedure. As one example, he states that “ Pakistani road construction crews have inadvertently signaled the location of... secret M-11 missiles by placing wide-radius roads...at Sargodha Missile Base” (1077). Addressing accidental use, Waltz dismisses the possibility: “ We do not have to wonder whether they will take good care of their weapons... They will not want to risk retaliation because one or more of their warheads accidentally strike another country” (9). Sagan believes accidents are likely because of “ complexity” and “ coupling”; that is, the more there is to a system and the faster that system unfolds (1078). In describing these attributes, Sagan identifies close calls during the Cold War, including 1962 US missile tests and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1079). More recently, he points to a “ lack of regulatory systems” in India and Pakistan, the countries he focuses on as most problematic in terms of possible exchange (1082). Finally Waltz (12) says the US’s denial of nuclear weapons to other nations so as to avoid disaster is misguided, stating that thinking that authoritarian nuclear regimes will fight is wrong.

Personal Reflection on the Debate

There are problems with both positions in this debate; Sagan and Waltz chose isolated incidents, include few moral propositions in their articles, and wrote the articles in an outdated world. The last point is understandable for Waltz, whose essay is written well before the September 11th attacks. While Waltz (6) acknowledges the threat of terrorism by stating that “ the likelihood of nuclear terror is low and... terrorists can presumably steal nuclear weapons or buy them on the black market whether or not a few more states go nuclear”, he clearly does not have the context of the most extreme attack of the kind he describes as a benchmark for probability. Nevertheless, his

position remains questionable even at the time of his writing for two reasons. First, the probability of an attack is less important than the magnitude of an attack. Nuclear weapon attacks threaten the existence of the world. Even a slight risk of attack is not worth it. Second, Waltz's position that nuclear theft on behalf of terrorists is a possibility regardless of regulation is dangerous. Many world ills (war, hunger, poverty, disease etc.) appear inevitable. Human self-cleansing of responsibility due to accepted inevitably is cowardly and unjust. Even if a hopeless situation seems likely to occur, we must address such an issue. Our progress rests on effort, not defeatism. (Despite this being his most persuasive possible argument, Sagan (1086) only mentions terrorism in passing at the end of his piece). Another sign of Waltz's (6 and 7) outdated viewpoint is his presumption that hostile dictators are rational actors that seek to prevent great costs. His mention of Saddam Hussein and Moamar Qaddafi as examples of leaders who are willing to show restraint is alarming. In 2003, Hussein's lack of rhetorical restraint and failure to comply with weapons inspectors led to his downfall (" Special Edition: The Capture of Saddam Hussein"). Had he had nuclear weapons, he may have used them against US forces. Waltz (11) theorizes about a nuclear-armed Iraq late in his piece, claiming that nuclear weapons would deter US invasion of the country. History proved him wrong when the US invaded Iraq precisely because of WMDs. Also, Qaddafi's recent actions show that he is willing to goad forces into attacking his country. Some might point to the dictator's 2003 disarmament (" Libya Promises to Give Up WMDs") as proof of his rational activity. However, this action was only one isolated event and has clearly been overshadowed by recent aggression in the Middle East.

Waltz (9) makes another peculiar statement that is outdated in claiming that “ Never in modern history, conventionally dated from 1648, have the great and major powers of the world enjoyed such a long period of peace.” This statement is false; the Vietnam War was a lack of peace for a world super power. In context of 9/11, this statement is even worse. In the context of human history, his fifty year sample is pitifully short. I find Sagan ultimately more persuasive. Works Cited " Libya Promises to Give Up WMDs." Live Saturday. CNN: 20 012 2003. Television. 13 Apr 2011. . Sagan, Scott. " The Perils of Proliferation in South Asia." Asian Survey. 41. 6 (2001): 1064-1086. Print. " Special Edition: The Capture of Saddam Hussein." Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer. CNN: 14 012 2003. Television. 13 Apr 2011. . Waltz, Kenneth. " Peace, Stability and Nuclear Weapons." Policy Papers, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, UC Berkeley. (1995): 1-12. Print.