

Assessment of the necessity of the nuclear proliferation treaty



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Perceptions regarding nuclear weapons presents a contradiction in terms of the existence of a “ peaceful nuclear past and a fearful nuclear future” (Sagan 66). Such a contradiction exists in terms of our current understanding regarding nuclear weapons and deterrence. Consider for example that during the Cold War period, nuclear weapons were widely believed to be one of the most important factors in maintaining the peace between the United States and the Soviet Union (Cimbali 224).

Currently, on the other hand, it is widely believed that enabling the continuing spread and development of nuclear weapons will only increase the risk of the development of a nuclear war. This is based upon the assumption that rival countries that are considered nuclear powers are unlikely to maintain stable deterrence. Due to this concern regarding the prevention of such an event, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was formulated during 1968. The treaty imposed an international limitation to the spread of nuclear weapons. It is based upon three main tenets: non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, disarmament of nuclear weapons, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. What follows is an analysis of the nuclear proliferation argument.

As was stated above, the main rationale for the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was the prevention of nuclear wars caused by the unstable deterrence between nuclear weapons states. According to the Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the agreement is based upon international mechanisms that operate within the foundations of international laws and norms.

Anxworthy further states that the NPT opts “ to promote and achieve a world without nuclear weapons” hence a world without a nuclear war impending in its historical future (1). As opposed to this, it has been argued by political scientists that if the main rationale for the treaty was the prevention of nuclear wars, then the treaty by prohibiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons defied itself in so far as enabling the proliferation of nuclear weapons ensures the prevention of nuclear wars.

According to Kenneth Waltz, “ nuclear weapons have been given a bad name” (731). Waltz argues that it is fallacious to assume that since nuclear weapons may cause catastrophic nuclear exchanges, nuclear wars will thereby cause global destruction. Waltz argues that nuclear weapons will enable the development of stability and peace since “ a nation will be deterred from attacking if it believes that there is a possibility that its adversary will retaliate” (734).

It is important to consider that Waltz’s claim is based upon the assumption that major wars amongst states occur as a result of the estimation of zero or low retaliation costs of a state from another state. In lieu of this, it is thereby possible to conclude that allowing the proliferation of nuclear weapons lessens the possibility of the development of nuclear wars since it ensures that countries will consider the high amount of risk involved in launching a nuclear attack towards a state with similar military capacities.

In lieu of this, I would like to conclude that it is indeed true that the choice between a more peaceful and co-operative versus a war-ridden and hostile world is highly dependent or critically dependent on the future of nuclear

weapons however, it does not necessarily necessitate the prevention of their further spread.

Works Cited

1. Cimballi, Stephen. *The Dead Volcano: The Background and Effects of Nuclear War Complacency*. Portsmouth, NH: Praeger/Greenwood, 2002
2. Halard, Muller, David Fischer, and Wolfgang Kotter. *Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Global Order*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. P., 1994.
3. Waltz, Kenneth. “ Nuclear Myths and Political Realities.” *American PoliticalScienceReviews* 84. 3 (September 1990).