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Nuclear Proliferation and Global Peace: Threat or Guarantee

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Abstract

This study explores whether nuclear-armed states contribute to a more peaceful world. First, it introduces the background of nuclear proliferation, including its origins, the countries involved, and its impact on global security. The paper then examines the definition of "peace", distinguishing between positive peace (the absence of structural violence) and negative peace (a temporary cessation of conflict). Through case studies—including the Korean War, Eisenhower's nuclear policy, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Russia-Ukraine war, the paper argues that nuclear proliferation primarily results in negative peace rather than lasting stability and positive peace. The study further explores two opposing perspectives on nuclear proliferation. Kenneth Waltz advocates for nuclear deterrence, asserting that nuclear weapons stabilize international relations by discouraging conflicts through the fear of retaliation. In contrast, Scott Sagan and other scholars argue that nuclear proliferation increases the risk of war, especially when irrational leaders, military organizations, or non-state actors (e.g., terrorists) gain access to nuclear weapons. Also, the study examines the U.S. role in nuclear disarmament, highlighting past efforts such as the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and other arms control agreements. However, the complexity of nuclear proliferation persists, with new nuclear states emerging and threatening global security. The paper concludes that nuclear weapons do not foster true world peace; instead, they heighten fear, instability, and the potential for catastrophic conflicts. To achieve lasting peace, nuclear disarmament is essential to mitigate risks and promote positive global stability.

Keywords

Nuclear Deterrence, Negative Peace, Global Security

1. Introduction

The question of whether to use nuclear weapons has become a controversial topic

for a long time. Supporters argue that nuclear weapons can be viewed as the ultimate form of deterrence, while opponents claim that nuclear weapons have the possibility to finish off human beings, and destroy the environment and creatures on Earth. My research question is to explore whether the states with nuclear weapons can make the world become more peaceful. In order to have a better outlook on this question, the study first introduces the background of nuclear proliferation, such as when did nuclear proliferation begin, and analyzes the states involved in nuclear proliferation. Second, the study discusses how to define the term "peace". More specifically, does nuclear proliferation bring the world positive peace or negative peace? Third, the study explores whether Waltz's argument about supporting nuclear proliferation can be tested in terms of evidence and study cases. If so, why is this the case? If not, what are the criticisms?

Nuclear proliferation refers to the rapid spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology, as well as fissile material to states that have not possessed them yet (Meyer, 1986). Generally speaking, nuclear proliferation has become a global conflict for decades. Also, nuclear weapons pose a massive threat to the human community. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in 2021, the stock of nuclear weapons worldwide stood at 13,080 (Dong, 2021). Approximately 30% of these are deployed with operational forces, and more than 90% are possessed by the United States and Russia (Woolf, 2020).

In 1942, the Manhattan Project was led by the U.S. government, aiming at developing nuclear weapons (Hughes, 2003). Since then, the nuclear age began with the development and usage of nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, because both the U.S. and the USSR possessed nuclear weapons, thus, the growing tensions between both states made nuclear war become possible.

In addition, because nuclear proliferation can spread nuclear weapons to states that are not acknowledged as nuclear weapon states by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Bunn & Timerbaev, 1993), which was opposed by nuclear-armed states and non-nuclear-armed states, since their governments concerned if more and more states possess nuclear weapons, the possibility of nuclear warfare will be increased, international and regional order would be disturbed, and even the states' sovereignty would be infringed. Therefore, in 1968, some of the major nuclear and non-nuclear states signed an agreement, the NPT, that pledged their cooperation in reducing the spread of nuclear weapons and technology (Einhorn & Samore, 2002). In 1970, the treaty came into effect. By then, 191 states had joined the treaty, containing the five major states that possessed nuclear weapons, such as the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, and China (Sagan, 1996). Also, eight states had already openly conducted nuclear tests and made the detonation of nuclear weapons successful, such as the U.S. (1945), the Soviet Union (1949), Great Britain (1952), France (1960), China (1964), India (1974), Pakistan (1998), and North Korea (2006) (Charnysh, 2006). Although North Korea had been a member of the NPT, it withdrew from the treaty in 2003 (Asada, 2004).

Although China signed the NPT, it is accelerating its deployment of nuclear warheads to amass 700 by 2027 and 1000 by 2030 (Bugos, 2021). The aim is to expand the amount of China's land-, sea-, and air-based platforms of nuclear delivery and construct the infrastructure to backing the expansion of its nuclear powers. Also, China is countering interventions by a third state in a conflict along its periphery, and projecting its nuclear power worldwide. There is no doubt that more deliverable nuclear weapons are necessary to become a nuclear superpower. It is estimated that China has possessed nearly 100 ICBMs with nuclear warheads compared with the U.S. (400) and Russia (1400) by 2021 (Kristensen & Korda, 2021). However, the question for China and Russia is whether they can be responsible nuclear powers. For instance, China only insists on its no-first-use policy, which means it has the potential to use nuclear weapons to make a response when attacked by another state. Also, in the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia views nuclear weapons as a tool of threat and intimidation, rather than deterrence. Therefore, Russia's action illustrates the difficulty in achieving positive peace, that is, having nuclear weapons merely act as a defensive tool rather than an offensive tool of state aggression. These two examples show that possessing nuclear weapons will become a hidden danger that threatens world peace.

On the other hand, Russia's nuclear arsenal has served as a shield for conventional aggression, allowing it to wage war in Ukraine without fear of direct military retaliation from NATO. Unlike the Cold War-era balance of power, where nuclear weapons prevented direct conflict between superpowers, Russia has exploited its nuclear capability to deter external intervention while engaging in conventional warfare. By frequently invoking the possibility of nuclear escalation—whether through tactical nuclear strikes or broader strategic threats—Russia has effectively coerced the West into limiting its support to Ukraine through arms shipments and sanctions rather than direct military involvement. This represents a shift from the classical deterrence model, where nuclear weapons served as a means to prevent war, to a model where they are used as tools of coercion that allow aggressive action under the nuclear umbrella.

2. Positive Peace or Negative Peace?

Positive peace can be viewed as the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 2011). In other words, it refers to the inequality of society and any aspects of social institutions that prevent people from meeting their basic needs for existence (Galtung, 1969). However, negative peace can be defined in two ways. First is peace in the shadow of terror. More specifically, this type of negative peace is brought by terror, inequality, threats, and suspicion. In other words, it is a tense peace. Second, according to Galtung, negative peace is the absence of direct violence (Tilahun, 2015), such as war. Moreover, a negative peace occurs when warring parties reach a cease-fire agreement, even though the conflicts will end, tensions between them still remain high.

The prohibition of nuclear weapons can bring positive peace in many aspects.

The spread of nuclear weapons brings fear and mistrust between states, which further diminishes the opportunity for economic and political stability among states. For instance, people affected by nuclear weapons would have to be displaced and relocated, as well as suffer deadly health consequences such as cancers, mental and physical illness, and water and food security. Also, producing and maintaining nuclear weapons occupies public funds for health care, education, disaster relief, and other well-being services. In other words, nuclear weapons bring such kinds of structural violence. In addition, the study examines four case studies: the Korean war, the nuclear policy during the Eisenhower administration, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Russia-Ukraine war to illustrate why nuclear proliferation can only bring the world negative peace, and the long-lasting peace cannot be built on the deterrence of nuclear weapons.

In 1945, the U.S. became the first state to use nuclear weapons by dropping two atomic bombs, one each on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which caused more than 21 thousand people dead (Folley et al., 1952). President Truman then assured that he would not use the bomb in future conflicts, such as the Korean War. However, to prevent the expansion of Soviet communism, the Truman administration built more nuclear weaponry. In 1949, the Cold War nuclear arms race was on when the USSR tested its own atomic bomb. In 1950, President Truman announced that he planned to authorize the use of nuclear weapons to realize peace in the Korean War (Dingman, 1988), yet there was no use of atomic weaponry by either side. This conflict eventually ended in a stalemate, which reflects Gultang's definition of negative peace.

In 1952, because the armistice talks of the Korean War continued to stagnate, President Eisenhower implied that his willingness to use nuclear weapons against China if the agreement cannot be reached as soon as possible. Although the U.S. and China reached peace after the Korean war, China always remembered the "nuclear blackmail" (Friedman, 1975) by the Eisenhower administration, and thus started to develop its domestic nuclear weapons program, which is the peace that was created under the shadow of terror. In 1953, although President Eisenhower delivered a speech about Atoms for Peace (Medhurst, 1987), which was considered to give impetus to organizing the institutions that formed many of the significant elements of nuclear non-proliferation states, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, it did not bring the world positive peace. In fact, from 1954 to 1955, President Eisenhower implied the willingness to use nuclear weapons against China during the First Quemoy and Matsu Crisis. His nuclear policy stemmed from the conviction that it is necessary to use nuclear weapons to defeat China, and the political concerns concerning the ramifications of a nuclear first strike (Rushkoff, 1981), which is built on the shadow of terror. Also, although President Eisenhower's nuclear assistance policy hastened the international diffusion of nuclear technology to a certain degree, some recipient states such as India, Pakistan, and Israel, diverted the U.S. nuclear aid to military uses, which has a possibility of nuclear proliferation and impose a threat to world peace.

The third example is the Cuban missile crisis, which ended up with peaceful negotiation, thus, can be viewed as the absence of conflict. In 1962, a U.S. military plane discovered Soviet Union nuclear missiles in Cuba. President Kennedy then sent its navy to Cuba and demanded that USSR leader Nikita Khrushchev dismantle those missiles. After the most dangerous thirteen days, Khrushchev agreed to remove nuclear missiles in exchange for the guarantee from the U.S. that there would be no attack on Cuba, the ally of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the U.S., which was out of range of the Soviet Union, agreed to remove missiles from Turkey secretly. The Cuban missile crisis was recognized as the point that the world was close to a global nuclear war (Blight et al., 1987). The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis resulted in negative peace rather than a lasting form of stability because it removed the immediate threat of nuclear war without addressing the underlying geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. While the U.S. and the USSR reached an agreement—whereby the Soviets withdrew their missiles from Cuba in exchange for a U.S. public declaration and private commitment not to invade Cuba, as well as the later removal of American Jupiter missiles from Turkey—the fundamental rivalry of the Cold War remained intact. The crisis de-escalated, but the arms race continued, and both nations remained deeply suspicious of each other. The settlement was more of a temporary compromise than a comprehensive solution, as it failed to eliminate the structural causes of the conflict, such as ideological opposition, mutual distrust, and the broader struggle for global influence. This fragile peace, based on deterrence rather than reconciliation, meant that future crises, such as the Vietnam War and ongoing nuclear brinkmanship, were inevitable, underscoring the limitations of the resolution in fostering long-term stability.

At last, when it comes to the Russia-Ukraine war, nuclear weapons do not play an effective role in preventing war, instead, they are facilitating the war. In fact, the Russia-Ukraine war is not the first proxy war fought between states with nuclear weapons. The solution is to create a space for peaceful dialogue, rather than escalation. However, nuclear weapons impede the possibility of peaceful negotiation since they are aimed at winning the war, and the possibility of nuclear war lies in the such attempt to win.

3. Two Opposite Standpoints about Nuclear Proliferation

There were two opposing theories regarding the issues of nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation. Some IR scholars refused to acknowledge the theory that nuclear proliferation would increase the possibility of nuclear conflict. Waltz claims to adhere to "more may be better", and "rational deterrence theory", he claims that the spread of nuclear weapons would bring stability and peace to the international or regional order since nuclear proliferation would be deterred from attacking each other by the risk of nuclear retaliation, which is adopted by North Korea in defense of its nuclear program. Moreover, Waltz claimed that nuclear deterrence is a form of peace that most states can acquire by possessing nuclear weap-

ons (Waltz, 1990). Waltz argues that in an anarchic state, it is important to protect the sovereignty and national security, especially in the nuclear era. Therefore, nuclear deterrence is necessary for states living under the threat of a nuclear rival. However, others claimed that nuclear weapons unavoidably increase the risk of a catastrophic nuclear explosion. For instance, Scott Sagan's "Organizational Theory" was used against nuclear proliferation. He argued that the behavior of the state and military are different. For instance, unlike the military going to war merely for victory, states aimed at gaining broader political interests. In other words, for the military, defeating the enemy even by a small margin still could be regarded as a victory (Sagan, 1994). Therefore, the military would be considered using nuclear weapons if they were not controlled by the states.

However, the argument is that Waltz's idea about using nuclear peace as justification for nuclear proliferation ignored the actual reasons for the general peace. After World War II, it was the notion of collective security and Democratic Peace Theory (Rosato, 2003), rather than the nuclear peace theory that brought peace to the world order. Also, the opposing argument for Waltz's assertion "more may be better (Waltz, 2013)" for nuclear proliferation is that he did not take the situation—"less rational actors take control of nuclear weapons" into consideration, such as terrorists. As non-state actors, terrorists lack restrictions and cannot be deterred by state-based means. For instance, as a nuclear state, although Pakistan confronted a nuclear-armed India, and had reasons to acquire nuclear weapons, it had not increased international security and peace as Waltz claimed. On the contrary, with the collapse of its internal security, terrorism became normalized in Pakistan. Although the nuclear capacity can guarantee its survival, the threat of nuclear weapons largely impedes the long-term security of the region in turn, as well as can destroy innocent neighboring states.

Moreover, for non-nuclear proliferation advocates, nuclear deterrence is not a stable way for states to protect themselves from gaining nuclear weapons (Mearsheimer, 1993). However, the deterrence strategy has two limitations. Firstly, if both Iraq and Israel possessed nuclear weapons, there would not be enhanced peace in the Middle East, nor would the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula if North Korea and South Korea were nuclear proliferation states, and if they were involved in the regional conflicts to gain more warheads and missiles than their rivals. In addition, the Cold War was not a period of peace but a period of intensified aggression and the fear of the possibility of a holocaust of nuclear proliferation. Amounts of historical evidence showed that keeping nuclear weapons can barely prevent a state from attacking another (Sagan, 1996). For instance, the U.S.'s nuclear weapons did not deter Chinese armies from attacking its forces at Yalu River, Britain's nuclear weapons did not stop Argentina from invading the Falkland Islands, and Israel's nuclear weapons did not stop Egypt from attacking in 1973 (Blechman & Hart, 1982). Also, the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969 over the Ussuri River and China invading Vietnam (a client state of the USSR) in 1979 showed that human error and fear of the possibility of nuclear proliferation did not deter a state

from invading another.

Secondly, although there is no doubt that nuclear weapons can bring an effective deterrence to some conflicts, as long as warring parties act rationally, their military capabilities will have checks and balances, there is no proof that nuclear deterrence can realize lasting peace, stability, and security. In other words, the nuclear deterrence theory can only be realized under certain preconditions, such as the rationality of political actors, the difference between deterrence and compellence, and the pursuit of national objectives rather than the supposedly unchallengeable nature of the international system. However, in a self-help international system, it is impossible that nuclear weapons can become a dependable preserver of peace and stability. In fact, the more nuclear-armed states, the more potential conflicts will be. According to deterrence theory, deterrence is most likely to be effective when attackers suppose that the probability of success is low and the costs of attack are high (Werner, 2000). However, on one hand, if developing states that lay on the periphery of the balance of power between the two powers with nuclear proliferation, possessed nuclear capability, the original balance of power would be broken, and the deterrence system would be threatened. On the other hand, if states with volatile border disputes have the ability to attack other states with nuclear weapons, the likelihood of nuclear wars would be increased. For instance, In 1964, China carried out its first nuclear test, which theoretically gave China a deterrent capability. However, its nuclear weapons systems left much to be desired, such as the uncertain reliability of missiles, and lack of the range to strike the targets in the USSR.

In addition, the Kargil War can be viewed as a counterexample of the Democratic Peace Theory and successful nuclear deterrence.

India and Pakistan have become nuclear powers since they successfully tested their nuclear weapons in 1998. Thereby, some people believe that nuclear deterrence can reduce the possibility of military conflicts between India and Pakistan, and bring stability and peace to the region. In other words, the presence of nuclear weapons can avoid war between these two states and achieve their political objectives peacefully. Based on the experience that nuclear deterrence between the U.S. and the USSR during the Cold War, many hold the optimistic attitude that nuclear war far outweighs its benefit and can effectively reduce the tensions between nuclear powers. Also, the Lahore Declaration included nuclear and non-nuclear Confidence Building Measures that were signed between India and Pakistan further promote such optimism. Therefore, advocates of nuclear deterrence are surprised by Kargil War between India and Pakistan, which challenged the nuclear deterrence theory based on the Cold War experience. The fact is that the nuclear weapons canceled out the advantage of India in conventional war from the perspective of Pakistan. In other words, it deters India from retaliating against Pakistan's invasion of Kashmir. Hence, Kargil War shows that stability at the strategic level can cause instability at the tactical level, and the conflicts-prone nature of the India-Pakistan relationship can have a qualitative change in a nuclear environment.

Also, the Democratic Peace Theory was proposed by Kant and Doyle, who argue that democratic states do not fight each other when they have conflicts, instead, democrats tend to settle peacefully through negotiation and dialogue. However, even though both India and Pakistan were being ruled by democratically elected leaders during the Kargil War, the war still happened because Pakistan's army takes an essential position in its domestic and foreign affairs since its independence, even if its civilian government controls affairs.

The concept of negative peace is particularly relevant to the nuclear relationship between India and Pakistan, where nuclear deterrence has prevented full-scale war but has not fostered meaningful reconciliation. While both nations have engaged in low-intensity conflicts, such as the Kargil War (1999) and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes, nuclear weapons have acted as a restraining factor, ensuring that hostilities remain below the threshold of total war. However, this deterrence has not eliminated tensions; instead, it has led to a stability-instability paradox, where limited conflicts, proxy wars, and cross-border skirmishes continue under the nuclear umbrella. Moreover, the region experiences recurring crises, such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the Pulwama-Balakot crisis (2019), demonstrating how peace remains fragile and crisis-prone. Unlike other historical rivalries that have transitioned to positive peace through economic and diplomatic cooperation, India and Pakistan remain locked in militarized deterrence, political distrust, and minimal cross-border engagement. This fragile balance highlights how nuclear deterrence can maintain negative peace by preventing large-scale war while allowing for ongoing tensions, conflicts, and hostilities that make true stability elusive.

At last, Waltz did not consider the character of the regime. For instance, compare with mixed regime dyads, jointly autocratic dyads (Wright & Diehl, 2016) are more likely to stay away from the escalation of militarization that may cause the use of nuclear weapons, and tend to end up with stalemate or negotiate outcomes and bring the negative peace, such as the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969.

4. The U.S. Role in Reducing the Nuclear Weapons

Although the U.S. has been keeping its role as the only existing superpower with a high level of nuclear capability, it makes efforts to build a world with no nuclear proliferation, as well as reduce nuclear weapons. For instance, although the U.S. consider employing nuclear weapons in Vietnam War, it did not happen for a variety of reasons, such as the fear of damaging its international image, domestic political considerations, and a reluctance to break the 20-year taboo on the use of nuclear weapons. President Johnson was concerned about the long-term consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara also proposed his strong opposition based on moral grounds (Kroenig, 2009). Therefore, there were no nuclear weapons used in the Vietnam War.

Also, in 1972, the U.S. and the Soviet Union leaders signed the treaty during to constrain the strategic nuclear weapons and anti-ballistic missile systems (Krepon,

2001). In 1974, President Ford and the leader of the Soviet Union reached an agreement on the Vladivostok Accords, which offered the outline for a successor treaty to Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) (Chiampan, 2018). In 1991, President Bush and Soviet Union leader Gorbachev reached an agreement on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) that required two states to reduce their nuclear weapons by one-third (Nolan, 1997). The START was a landmark agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, later succeeded by Russia, aimed at reducing and limiting strategic offensive arms. Signed in 1991 and entering into force in 1994, START played a crucial role in shaping nuclear disarmament efforts at the end of the Cold War. The treaty mandated significant reductions in nuclear warheads and delivery systems, enhancing strategic stability between the two superpowers. Its successor, New START, signed in 2010, continued these efforts by imposing further limits on deployed strategic nuclear weapons. The relevance of the START treaties lies in their role as a foundation for nuclear arms control, influencing subsequent diplomatic negotiations and security policies. Their implementation demonstrated the possibility of verifiable arms reduction, fostering an environment of trust and cooperation essential for global nonproliferation efforts. The principles established by START remain critical in discussions on contemporary arms control, particularly amid evolving geopolitical tensions and technological advancements in strategic weaponry.

Also, President Bush's efforts on nuclear warhead dismantlement cooperation were to improve the security of nuclear proliferation, as well as aimed at dealing with the nuclear dangers brought to light by the attempted coup against Gorbachev by the hardliners of the Soviet Union in August 1991. Therefore, the Bush Administration maintained that the U.S. would further reduce its operationally deployed warheads of arsenal to between 1700 and 2200 (Woolf, 2009), to avoid the possibility of nuclear war.

5. Conclusion

The politics of nuclear proliferation develops a significant dimension of contemporary international relations. There is no doubt that the emergence of nuclear weapons has made a huge impact on the international power structure. Meanwhile, nuclear proliferation made the securing of disarmament and arms control greatly complicated. Originally, the U.S. domination over nuclear weapons made it become the world's most powerful state. Then, the Soviet Union's success in getting nuclear proliferation led to the emergence and strengthening of bipolarity in the international system. Therefore, nuclear weapons became a factor in the power status of these two great powers during the Cold War. At the same time, tensions between the U.S. and the USSR triggered the possibility of nuclear proliferation. Meanwhile, both states began building up massive nuclear weapons as protection against the annihilation of their national interests. Although tensions seemed to be escalated, leaders of both states were well-aware that even an accidental blunder would spell doom for the world. This shared belief in the human

community made both states put safeguards in the first place and brought them to the negotiating table. For instance, in 1987, major arms reduction agreements were signed by President Reagan and Gorbachev. In 1992, with the fall of the USSR, the threats brought by nuclear war have been greatly diminished.

Nevertheless, in the last few years, with the changes in the international nuclear power structure, nuclear proliferation has become more complex. In addition to the original great nuclear powers, the U.S. and Russia, with the expansion of the nuclear states, such as the participation of Britain, France, and China, the bipolar power structure was transformed into a multipolar power structure. However, there is a difference between a major power and secondary power in a multipolar nuclear order. For instance, secondary powers such as South Korea have wanted the bomb, but the U.S. stopped them (Bracken, 2012). In addition, some states that have nuclear capabilities, such as North Korea, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Israel, still face the issues of nuclear proliferation.

The U.S. has played a pivotal role in reducing nuclear weapons through a combination of arms control agreements, non-proliferation initiatives, and diplomatic efforts aimed at fostering global security. Since the Cold War, the U.S. has engaged in bilateral treaties with Russia, such as the START series and the New START Treaty, which have significantly reduced the number of deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems. Additionally, Washington has been a leading advocate for the Treaty on the NPT, reinforcing global norms against the spread of nuclear weapons. U.S.-led initiatives, such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, have also helped secure and dismantle nuclear stockpiles in former Soviet states, mitigating the risks of nuclear proliferation and terrorism. However, challenges remain, including the modernization of nuclear arsenals, emerging threats from rogue states, and the breakdown of arms control agreements due to geopolitical tensions. While these efforts have contributed to global stability, the U.S. must continue diplomatic engagement with nuclear and non-nuclear states alike to prevent arms races and strengthen international security frameworks. Ultimately, its leadership in nuclear disarmament is crucial for maintaining strategic stability and fostering long-term global peace.

Furthermore, based on two opposing theories concerning nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation, the study challenged Waltz's theory about supporting nuclear proliferation, such as his nuclear peace theory. Peace should refer to positive aspects of mutual support and cooperation. However, Waltz gave a new meaning to the notion of peace, that is, brought by nuclear weapons. In my view, Waltz turned "peace" into negative peace—a peace in the shadow of terror, as well as the absence of conflict, which was imposed by nuclear proliferation. Moreover, because of the limitations of the deterrence strategy, nuclear proliferation establishes a balance of terror in the international power structure. Nowadays, nuclear weapons still constitute a main determinant of relations between states with nuclear weapons and states without nuclear weapons. Compared with the nuclear states, the non-nuclear states were vulnerable in protecting their national interests.

In sum, any use of nuclear weapons by miscalculation and malicious intentions can cause a catastrophic disaster for human society, the economy, and the environment. Therefore, nuclear weapons cannot bring world peace for five reasons. First, only rational and predictable behavior can make nuclear deterrence work, however, this is not the way people work, especially during warfare. Second, from the historical narrative, since 1945, nuclear weapons do not play a significant role in preventing military conflicts (such as aggressing against states with nuclear weapons) and bringing positive peace. Third, instead of making the conflicts better, nuclear weapons make them worse. For example, the Russia-Ukraine war shows how states with nuclear weapons (Russia) threaten the states with no nuclear weapons (Ukraine), and constrain their capacities to respond. Fourth, nuclear deterrence makes the use of nuclear weapons become possible, because states with nuclear weapons always prepare to launch nuclear weapons. At last, nowadays, there are many factors that can threaten world peace, such as terrorism, climate change, poverty, cyber-attacks, and human trafficking. Although stopping these activities is a national security priority for most states, it is not reasonable for them to use nuclear weapons to deter these threats or to compel the states engaged in them to stop. In a nutshell, nuclear weapons cannot be used to solve such security issues. In fact, these risks can reinforce the instability in the world in turn. For instance, cyber-attacks can manipulate national leaders to launch nuclear strikes due to misinformation or miscalculation. Therefore, eliminating nuclear weapons can remove potential collateral risks, and eventually bring the world positive peace.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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