

THE COPENHAGEN TEMPTATION:

RETHINKING PREVENTION AND PROLIFERATION IN THE AGE OF DETERRENCE DOMINANCE

Francis J. Gavin

Mira Rapp-Hooper

What price should the United States – or any leading power – be willing to pay to prevent nuclear proliferation? For most realists, who believe nuclear weapons possess largely defensive qualities, the price should be small indeed. While additional nuclear states might not be welcomed, their appearance should not be cause for undue alarm. Such equanimity would be especially warranted if the state in question lacked other attributes of power. Nuclear acquisition should certainly not trigger thoughts of preventive military action, a phenomena typically associated with dramatic shifts in the balance of power.

The historical record, however, tells a different story. Throughout the nuclear age and despite dramatic changes in the international system, the United States has time and again considered aggressive policies, including the use of force, to prevent the emergence of nuclear capabilities by friend and foe alike. What is even more surprising is how often this temptation has been oriented against what might be called “feeble” states, unable to project other forms of power. The evidence also reveals that the reasons driving this preventive thinking often had more to do with concerns over the systemic consequences of nuclear proliferation, and not, as we might expect, the dyadic relationship between the United States and the proliferator. Factors

typically associated with preventive motivations, such as a shift in the balance of power or the ideological nature of the regime in question, were largely absent in high-level deliberations.

This article explain *why* the United States has been willing to consider aggressive policies, including preventive attacks, against otherwise weak potential proliferators by defining and detailing a previously unidentified phenomenon, the Copenhagen Temptation (CT). The CT is a particular kind of preventive motivation by a system-leading power against emerging nuclear states, and is primarily driven by a fear of the limitations nuclear proliferation places on a leading state's ability to project power. This preventive inclination has been a surprisingly persistent force in U.S. deliberations since the earliest days of the nuclear age, regardless of administration or ideology. Nor are the conditions that drive it likely to disappear anytime soon. Understanding the CT is important not just because of what it tells us about preventive motivations; it also provides a window into how a leading power thinks about and assesses the consequences of nuclear proliferation on its interests, and why it is willing to consider aggressive policies to stop it.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first section explores the extant literature on preventive motivations and explains how it fails to capture the effects that nuclear proliferation has on a leading state's calculations. We then define the Copenhagen Temptation and explain why it is fundamentally different than other types of previously identified preventive calculations. We define terms, explain the selection of the cases, and provide a standard for how we should recognize serious preventive thinking in the nuclear age. The second section examines two cases of the Copenhagen Temptation: U.S. policy towards China in 1963-64 and North Korea 1993-1994, and investigates a third example where strong elements of the CT were present – U.S. policy towards Pakistan in 1978-79.

The third section explores what the persistence of the Copenhagen Temptation reveals about the limitations of traditional preventive war theories. The CT also reveals how a leading state like the United States calculates the effect of new nuclear states on their own freedom and power in the international system, which in turn drives their overall policies towards nuclear nonproliferation. While most analysts focus on the stabilizing aspects that deterrence dominance brings, we argue that the dramatic and permanent limitations nuclear weapons place on a leading power gives it powerful incentives to act aggressively, even against otherwise feeble states. We suggest that the Copenhagen Temptation is the most extreme of a host of robust and often hostile nonproliferation policy options, all of which may be geared towards forestalling the systemic consequences of nuclear spread. We conclude by arguing that the willingness to seriously consider aggressive policies, including military action, suggests that preventing nuclear proliferation was and will remain a far higher priority for the leading power in the system, the United States, than we have recognized.

I. Prevention, Proliferation and Power

When the Bush administration unveiled its new security strategy in the wake of the 9/11 attacks upon the United States, there were howls of protest against the explicit embrace of a strategy of pre-emption, which insightful observers accurately recognized as a strategy of preventive war.¹ Outrage escalated when many analysts believed this strategy was implemented

¹ “Text of Bush’s Speech at West Point,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2002, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/01/international/02PTEX-WEB.html>. Philip Zelikow, who was involved in drafting the national security document, argued that national security officials fully understood the differences between the terms pre-emption and prevention but chose the former to strengthen “the Bush administration’s case under international law.” “The phrase, “preventive war,” had bad associations in nineteenth-century Europe and early 1950s Cold War history.” Philip Zelikow, “U.S. Strategic Planning in 2001-02,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and

against Iraq in March 2003.² Several commentators saw this as a sharp and unfortunate break from past U.S. policies and traditions. Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay claimed, “The Bush strategy represented a profound strategic innovation... Bush effectively abandoned a decades-long consensus that put deterrence and containment at the heart of American foreign policy.” The centerpiece of the strategy, the emphasis on preventive war “would prove highly controversial.”³

Why? Preventive military action is perhaps the most extreme policy measure a state can take. International law scholars have questioned its legality.⁴ Other scholars view it as ineffective.⁵ As a democracy, one might have expected preventive war thinking to be rare.⁶ The Bush strategy and the attack on Iraq were seen by many as anomalous, because it cut across long-standing traditions, policies, and support for international law. According to Robert Pape, until the Bush administration “the United States has had the most benign intentions of almost any great power throughout the past two centuries.” The post 9/11 embrace of preventive war

Jeffrey W. Legro, eds, *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 113-114.

² “For an excellent analysis of this speech, see Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 118, no. 3, 2003, especially pp. 369-373. Zelikow argues that the 2003 attack was primarily motivated by a desire to eliminate Iraq’s purported nuclear weapons program. Leffler and Legro, 110-114. For additional arguments that the war was both preventive and oriented towards Iraq’s purported nuclear program, see Jeffrey Record, “Nuclear Deterrence, Preventive War, and Counterproliferation,” *Policy Analysis*, June 8th, 2004, available at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa519.pdf> Kenneth M. Pollack has argued, Iraq’s alleged nuclear program “was the real linchpin of the Bush Administration’s case for an invasion.” Kenneth M. Pollack, “Spies, Lies, and Weapons: What Went Wrong,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (January/February 2004): 81. Chaim Kaufman argues that many members of Congress “gave the nuclear threat as the main or one of the main reasons for their votes” supporting the war resolution in October 2002. Chaim Kaufman, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War.” *International Security* 29 (Summer 2004), p. 41.

³ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 124-125.

⁴ For several examples, see Harold Hongju Koh, “Comment,” in Michael Doyle, *Striking First* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); W. Michael Reisma, “Assessing Claims to Revise the Laws of War,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Jan., 2003), 82-90; Miriam Sapiro, “Iraq: The Shifting Sands of Preemptive Self-Defense,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (Jul., 2003), 599-607.

⁵ Dan Reiter, “Preventive Attacks Against Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons Programs: The Track Record,” Ridgeway Working Group Paper, 2006.

⁶ Randall L. Schweller, “Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?,” *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1992), 268.

thinking meant that, “for the first time, the United States has adopted a national security policy that calls for premeditated military attacks against countries that are not currently at war against the United States.”⁷ Despite these costs and criticisms, however, high-ranking members of both political parties have not abandoned preventive strategies, and the option appears to remain on the table for dealing with Iran and North Korea’s nuclear program.⁸

More recent scholarship has pointed out that preventive thinking among U.S. policymakers is not merely a post 9/11 phenomenon, and has been less rare than was once thought.⁹ These scholars have not, however, provided a compelling explanation for this thinking, nor have they distinguished the divergent motivations between preventive war in the pre-nuclear age and preventive action in the nuclear age. Most importantly, they have neither identified nor explained the willingness of the United States to consider preventive military strikes against states developing nuclear weapons as part of a long-standing strategy to inhibit proliferation.

⁷ Robert Pape, “Soft Balancing: How the World Will Respond to US Preventive War on Iraq,” Oak Park Coalition for Truth and Justice, January 20, 2003, <http://www.opctj.org/articles/robert-a-pape-university-of-chicago-02-21-2003-004443.html>.

⁸ Adam Entous, “U.S. Considers Options to Curb Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *Reuters*, April 18, 2010. See also the controversy and discussion surrounding Jeffrey Goldberg’s article, “The Point of No Return,” *The Atlantic*, September 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/09/the-point-of-no-return/8186/>. While the article focused on an Israeli strike, Goldberg concludes by saying the chances of a U.S. strike were increasing. See the blog response of Elliot Abrams, “Obama Bombing Iran? Don’t be Surprised,” *The Atlantic Online*, August 17, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/08/obama-bombing-iran-dont-be-surprised/61578/>. And high-level former officials from both parties continue to recommend military attacks against North Korea’s nuclear missile capabilities under certain circumstances. On the Republican side, see Philip Zelikow, “Be Ready to Strike and Destroy North Korea’s Missile Test,” February 17th, 2009, from the blog, *Shadow Government at FP.com*, http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/02/17/now_is_the_time_to_bomb_north_koreas_missile_test. For the views of two high-level Democrats, see Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, “If Necessary, Strike and Destroy,” June 22nd, 2006, *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/21/AR2006062101518.html>. It should be noted Carter was confirmed as the Obama Administration’s Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics on April 27th, 2009.

⁹ See Marc Trachtenberg, “Preventive War and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Henry Shue and David Rodin, *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). John Lewis Gaddis also emphasizes a long tradition of preventive war thinking in American history; see his, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Gaddis does, however, argue that this thinking was largely absent during the Cold War. “The history of American grand strategy during the Cold War is remarkable for the *infrequency* with which the United States acted unilaterally, as well as top-level resistance to ... preventive war.”

In many ways, the prevalence of the preventive thinking among U.S. policy calculations is surprising. Leading IR scholars, often associated with defensive realism, have noted the stabilizing systemic effects of nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Offensive realists -- who dispute many of the claims about the international system held by defensive realists -- agree that nuclear weapons lessen the chances of war and believe a leading power like the United States should both understand, and in some circumstances, encourage the spread of nuclear weapons.¹¹ Neither strand of scholarship predicts, explains, or approves of the leading power preventive motivations against the nascent nuclear programs of feeble states.

At the dawn of the nuclear age, Bernard Brodie called atomic weapons “a powerful inhibitor to aggression,” and Kenneth Waltz insists that nuclear weapons make war less likely.¹² According to many scholars, war should be more rare in a nuclear world because these weapons are “defense dominant” or “deterrence dominant.” As Robert Jervis points out, the fact that there is no defense against nuclear weapons is a “triumph not of the offense, but of deterrence.”¹³ Karen Ruth Adams’ suggests that deterrence dominance should be even more powerful than defense dominance. War, and presumably preventive war thinking, would be less likely with nuclear weapons because “states have less need to expand because the difficulty of defending

¹⁰There is at least one argument for why we might expect to see *more* preventive war thinking in the nuclear age, but we suggest that this does not apply here. Scott Sagan has argued that preventive strikes should be more common when civilian control is subordinated to the military. In the cases of US thinking we examine, however, civilian advocacy for preventive strikes was as strong if not stronger than that of the military, suggesting that this explanation does not apply. See Sagan and Waltz, 53-55; 92-93.

¹¹ John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56; John J. Mearsheimer, "The Case for a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 50-66.

¹² Herkin, *Counsels*, 9, as quoted in Steven Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 241; Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 45.

¹³ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1978), 211.

against absolute weapons makes it unlikely that deterrence dominance will be overturned.”¹⁴

Deterrence dominance should apply to small nuclear powers without massive arsenals as well as to great powers.¹⁵ Kenneth Waltz’s proliferation optimist position that “More May Be Better”, for example, largely hinges on this notion. Even critics of Waltz’s view, including Scott Sagan, acknowledge the powerful deterrent qualities of nuclear weapons.¹⁶

Perhaps most surprisingly, the literature on preventive war does not define or explain the unique forces driving the CT, and does not distinguish it from conventional preventive war motivations. The leading scholar on the question defines preventive war as “a strategy designed to forestall an adverse shift in the balance of power and driven by a better-now-than-later logic. Faced with a rising and potentially hostile adversary, it is better to fight now than risk the likely consequences of inaction.”¹⁷ This idea that preventive war thinking is motivated by a perceived shift in a dyadic balance of power is prevalent in the literature on bargaining, as well as among realist scholars.¹⁸ But because of the deterrent nature of nuclear weapons, Steven Van Evera notes that shifts in the nuclear balance pose “no threat that needs forestalling. The reason is that even large shifts in relative force levels have little effect on relative power. Preventive war

¹⁴ Karen Ruth Adams, “Attack and Conquer? International Anarchy and the Offense-Defense-Deterrence Balance,” in Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, *Offense, Defense, and War* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004) 404.

¹⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, “More May Be Better,” *Adelphi Paper*, No. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981). Mearsheimer agrees with Waltz that theories of international politics should in most cases also apply to smaller powers; Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, p. 403, fn 5.

¹⁶ Scott Sagan notes that incentives for preventive action against new nuclear states may indeed exist. Sagan’s argument, however, suggests that military leaders should be more likely to recommend preventive strikes than their civilian counterparts (see Sagan and Waltz 53-63). While organizational biases may indeed be important, they do not necessarily undercut deterrence dominance on the international level. A systemic explanation for this type of prevention is called for

¹⁷ Levy, *Preventive War and Democratic Politics*, 1.

¹⁸ James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1995); Robert Powell, *In The Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 115-148.

makes no sense because there is no future danger to prevent. The future looks like the present: force ratios may change but decliners know they will remain sovereign and secure.”¹⁹

Where the preventive war literature has assessed the willingness of the U.S. to consider military attacks against emerging nuclear powers, it has lumped this impulse into the same “better now than later” category used to explain conventional preventive wars of territorial conquest between great powers. These include Germany’s calculations in 1914 and Japan’s position towards the United States in 1941. This is especially problematic, since most of the potential targets of the U.S. preventive calculations in the nuclear age were not truly rising nor did they possess anywhere near the ability to project power like Russia in 1914 or the United States in 1941. Most of the objects of the Copenhagen Temptation were, in fact, what we label “feeble states.” Feeble states lack the attributes of a great or even a middle power, which should include most if not all of the following: a wealthy, dynamic economy, stable governance, favorable geography and abundant natural resources, and robust offensive military capabilities with the ability to project power beyond their near abroad.²⁰ It is also a state that, absent nuclear weapons, could not possibly threaten the United States.²¹ Nor would the United States have any interest in conquering or controlling the state.

Standard preventive war theory, therefore, may be able help us understand why great powers might consider wars of conquest against a state whose conventional military power is on

¹⁹ Van Evera, 245. Jack Levy does suggest crossing the nuclear threshold is a particularly strong form of the same dyadic power shift that motivates conventional preventive war.

²⁰ A feeble state may have a large army that can threaten its near neighbors, but unless it can project that power against the territory of the United States (i.e. with a blue water navy or long-range air power) or dominate its own region with its conventional forces, it is not a great power.

²¹ Both defensive and offensive realists agree that a feeble states simply acquiring nuclear weapons should not, by itself, produce a dramatic shift in the balance of power that would threaten a leading power. Kenneth Waltz has argued, “gunpowder did not blur the distinction between great powers and others, nor have nuclear weapons done so. Nuclear weapons are not the great equalizers they were sometimes thought to be.” John Mearsheimer appeared to agree: “even in a nuclear world, land power remains king.” Waltz, 183; Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, p. 135.

the rise. They are far less helpful, however, to explain U.S. preventive motivations since 1945.²² Indeed, the question of *why* a great power like the US would consider such an extreme measure as preventive strikes against an emerging and otherwise feeble nuclear state raises important questions about nuclear proliferation more broadly. Michael Horowitz puts it nicely: “How is it that North Korea, with its tiny economy and backward regime, can make the front page of *The New York Times*?”²³ Why does a dominant power like the United States consider striking a far-off, weaker power that does not pose a proximate threat?²⁴

What is the Copenhagen Temptation?

Our name for this phenomenon, the Copenhagen Temptation, builds upon the term, “Copenhagen Complex,” developed by the historian Jonathan Steinberg to explain Wilhelmine Germany’s obsessive fear that Great Britain would launch preventive strikes to destroy their growing fleet of capital ships.²⁵ Because of Denmark’s neutrality and relatively small army, the Germans believed that the seizure of the Danish fleet in 1807 reflected the British desire to prevent any state from building a naval capacity that could threaten the Royal Navy. Britain’s focus was solely upon a rival’s naval forces, not its intentions, character, or non-naval forms of power. As the German naval official Korvetten-Kapitan Ludwig Schroder put it, the “English government never hesitated to disregard the rights of neutral nations when British interests were

²² Dan Reiter, “Preventive War and Its Alternatives: The Lessons of History,” Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, April 2006, 2-3; Levy and Thompson, 47; Marc Trachtenberg, “Preventive War and US Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2007).

²³ Michael C. Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 98.

²⁴ Scott Sagan has argued that there may be greater incentive for preventive strikes between regional adversaries like Israel and Iraq due to the fact that proliferation does create a proximate threat in these cases. See Sagan and Waltz, 53-55. The US calculus against China and North Korea, however, was in no way based on such proximity.

²⁵ Jonathan Steinberg, “The Copenhagen Complex,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 1, No. 3, July, 1966, 23-46.

at stake”²⁶ And as the Civil Lord of the British Admiralty told an audience, “the Royal Navy would get its blow in first before the other side had time to even read in the papers that war had been declared.”²⁷

The building of capital ships in the 19th and early 20th century is the closest historical parallel to a capability that had the potential to fundamentally alter international military calculations and challenge the system’s leading state, although the revolutionary effects of nuclear weapons were far more significant. As Robert Jervis has stated, “nuclear weapons have drastically altered statecraft.”²⁹ Unlike capital ships, where total numbers mattered, the mere possession of even a small nuclear capability can dramatically upset a leading power’s military and geopolitical calculations. It also highlights another key difference: naval capabilities can drive state power projection, whereas nuclear weapons are most notable for their defensive and deterrent qualities. In other words, the Copenhagen Temptation reflects a leading power’s fear that the system-altering effects of nuclear weapons will limit its own power and freedom. It drives the powerful motivation to take serious steps, even military action, to prevent new nuclear capabilities from emerging. Despite these differences, U.S. attitudes towards nuclear proliferation mirror Germany’s prewar fears of Great Britain’s attitude. “Come what may, the seas are still ours, and we’ll destroy anyone who’ll deny us this domination.”³⁰

²⁶ It is important to note that, as Steinberg points out, the use of this historical analogy in pre-World War I Germany was problematic at best. While the Germans identified themselves with the Danes, it is understandable that the British saw Wilhelmine Germany as closer to Napoleonic France. The British justified their attack on the Danes based on their fears their fleet would fall into the hands of Napoleon, similar to the logic the British used in their attack on Vichy France’s fleet at Mers-el-Kabir in July 1940. We use the term to define the capabilities based logic of a preventive attack, and not to explain German fears of being *Copenhagened*, or attacked themselves.

²⁷ Steinberg, p. 39.

²⁹ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospects of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 2.

³⁰ Steinberg, p. 45. Again, this quote from the German novelists Theodor Fontane reflected widespread German fears of what Great Britain was actually thinking, not necessarily what was motivating British calculations.

The Copenhagen Temptation is not the same as other kinds of preventive war motivation, which explains why it has been misunderstood or mislabeled by many scholars and policy commentators. There are three crucial differences. First, the CT emerges from a powerful desire by a system-leading power to limit and reverse nuclear proliferation. The use of preventive military force is just one tool; it exists on the extreme end of a continuum of coercive nonproliferation policies that system leaders have considered, both against adversaries and allies, during both the bipolar Cold War and unipolar post Cold War international systems, to inhibit nuclear possession by other states.³¹ Second, the CT is driven by the emergence of a nuclear capability, regardless of the political orientation of the regime or whether the state possesses or lacks other forms of military power.³² Third, the CT is motivated less by dyadic concerns, i.e. the specifics of the U.S.-North Korea relationship, than larger regional and even systemic concerns such as tipping points. In other words, U.S. policymakers' preventive worries go beyond the influence that nuclear possession would have on the target state's behavior to a broader worry over its effect on U.S. freedom of action towards the state and in the region.

Case selection

³¹ We focus on preventive thinking by the United States, but there is ample evidence that the Soviet Union seriously considered striking the nuclear programs of smaller states, including Israel, South Africa and West Germany. See Appendices for Matthew Fuhrmann and Sarah E. Kreps "Targeting Nuclear Programs in War and Peace: A Quantitative Empirical Analysis, 1942-2000," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*; see Kosygin-Johnson message, 11 January 1966, FRUS, 1964-1968, XI, pp. 280-281 for Soviet threats to strike the FRG if Bonn started a nuclear program. See Meeting between President Carter, Foreign Minister Gromyko, and other U.S. and U.S.S.R. Officials, September 23, 1977, Declassified Document Reference System, Document number CK3100126783, p. 14, for the Soviets on South Africa.

³² Of course, Marc Trachtenberg and others have documented U.S. preventive war thinking against the Soviet Union during the early Cold War. One could argue that this thinking was driven by the more traditional fear of a shift in the overall balance of power. What is interesting, however, is that preventive war thinking was only taken seriously in the context of Soviet nuclear capabilities. If U.S. defense spending -- which decreased dramatically after World War II, and rose sharply only after the Soviet's detonated a nuclear device -- is any guide, U.S. preventive motivations were driven by emerging Soviet nuclear capabilities. See Trachtenberg, "Preventive War and U.S. Foreign Policy," pp. 4-7; and Trachtenberg, "A 'Wasting Asset': American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949-1954," in *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 100-152.

To theorize on why a great power like the US considers preventive strikes against feeble powers we consider the cases of policy towards China in 1963/64 and North Korea in 1993/94. But what can we learn from examples where, in the end, the United States *did not* succumb to the CT and launch preventive strikes?

Despite the fact that the US did not succumb to the Copenhagen Temptation in the cases we examine, we contend that this gap between “thinking” and “doing” is not as problematic as it might appear. The leading scholar of preventive war, Jack Levy, correctly insists we should focus on the preventive *motivations* for war, which actually allows for a more rigorous and explicit understanding of the causal factors influencing state leaders (and avoids defining the type of war by its causes).³³ As Marc Trachtenberg has pointed out, preventive war thinking in high policy circles can tell us a lot about what is driving overall strategy, even in the absence of a preventive attack. When looking at aggressive policies, the “real question is not whether such a policy was adopted, but what kind of political weight this kind of thinking carried.”³⁴

Furthermore, as Dale Copeland has argued, theories that only offer a dichotomous choice – a military attack is initiated or it is not – have a limited use in the nuclear age, when the cost of conflict can be extraordinarily high. Rigorous theories of war, Copeland insists “must explain why states would move from peaceful engagement to a destabilizing cold war rivalry, or from such a rivalry into crises.”³⁵ While the costs of preventive strikes against China and North Korea were not as high as a clash with the Soviet Union, the potential for much wider escalation was considerable.

³³ Ibid, 3-4; Jack S. Levy, “Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War,” *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1987).

³⁴ Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 102.

³⁵ Copeland, *The Origins of Major Wars*, 3.

In examining preventive motivations in the nuclear age, we establish a rigorous standard for measuring serious preventive war thinking and planning, as opposed to ad hoc or off-the-cuff musings on the subject. In the case of the United States, we believe preventive thinking is serious if (a) it emerges from and/or is discussed in the President's inner circle, (b) the option is debated at that level over a period of time, and (c) it results in the creation of military plans that are themselves considered at the Presidential or cabinet level. The creation of military contingency plans for possible preventive strikes does *not* by itself qualify as an instance of CT. Cabinet level officials including the President must seriously consider these strike plans as part of a broader policy debate for a case to qualify as a manifestation of this phenomenon.

Because we seek to theorize on the causal mechanisms that bring about the Copenhagen Temptation, we have selected two cases in which CT was present—the sometimes-impugned practice of selecting on the dependent variable. This method is particularly appropriate to our goal, however. Our research objective is focused on locating independent variables of interest, and the inductive examination of these two cases allows us to identify the variables and causal paths that bring this Temptation to pass. Future work will test the theory generated here on cases where CT is absent as well as present.³⁶ And for the purposes of this inductive investigation, we provide variation on important independent variables that one might plausibly expect to influence CT.

The Chinese and North Korean cases are ideal to test propositions about preventive incentives that have emerged from recent scholarship. Specifically, the Chinese case occurred in a pre-NPT, bipolar world, while the North Korean case occurred in a post-NPT, unipolar one.

³⁶ For more on why this research design is ideal for theory generation, see George and Bennett, 75-80; Van Evera, 47. Our ability to theorize on these cases is strengthened by the use of several different types of sources. These include primary archival documents, interviews, and secondary sources. See George and Bennett, 23.

The effect of the NPT on proliferation and nonproliferation policy is certainly a subject of much debate. Nonetheless, several scholars have argued that the NPT regime has made nuclear proliferation decidedly illegitimate and more difficult over time, and preventive thinking more likely.³⁷

Perhaps more significantly, leading realist theories anticipate differences in bipolar and unipolar or multipolar systems, both in terms of the effects of nuclear proliferation and the likelihood of preventive motivations. In 1990, John Mearsheimer argued that the end of bipolarity would usher in a period of increased instability, and noted specifically that unmanaged proliferation in the post-Cold War world could be accompanied by an increased incentive for prevention.³⁸ Dale Copeland, on the other hand, has suggested that we should see higher incentives for prevention in bipolar as opposed to multipolar worlds.³⁹ Countering the idea that these structural conditions only affect great power competition, Debs and Monteiro argue there should be greater incentives for preventive strikes against nascent nuclear powers under unipolarity.⁴⁰ If similar preventive calculations took place in the Chinese and North Korean examples despite these differences in systemic structure and the normative environment, we should be surprised.

Beyond our examination of the Chinese and North Korean cases, we also briefly explore the case of US thinking towards Pakistan in 1978/79. Some scholars have cited this as a case of serious preventive thinking, though as of yet the declassified evidence available to us does not

³⁷ Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996-1997), 76; Lewis A. Dunn, "The NPT: Assessing the Past, Building on the Future," *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (July 2009), pp. 143-172; Scott A. Silverstone, *Preventive War and American Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

³⁸ John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), 5-56.

³⁹ Copeland, *The Origins of Major Wars*, 15-17.

⁴⁰ See Alexandre Debs and Nuno Monteiro, "Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself? Nuclear Proliferation and Preventive War," November 5, 2010, accessed at <http://www.nunomonteiro.org/wp-content/uploads/DebsMonteiro2010.pdf>.

meet our rigorous standard for a case of CT.⁴¹ There is little doubt that the U.S. pursued an aggressive nonproliferation strategy towards Pakistan; future research may well substantiate this as another instance of the Copenhagen Temptation. If it does, this would suggest that the CT applies to allies as well as adversaries—a surprising finding indeed.

II. Assessing the CT: China and North Korea

That policymakers considered the use of preventive force against the nascent Chinese and North Korean nuclear programs in 1963-64 and 1993-94 is not a new finding. But the comparative examination of these two cases generates important insights about the motivations that drove preventive thinking, as well as its severity. We establish the extent of preventive thinking and planning in both cases, including the fact that the U.S. considered unilateral action against the potential target state. We go on to argue that in neither case was preventive motivation based a perceived shift in the dyadic balance of power traditionally defined. Instead, policymakers were concerned about a Chinese and North Korean nuclear capability exclusively: these countries did not otherwise constitute a major threat to core U.S. interests. They gravely feared that Chinese and North Korean nuclearization could unleash proliferation cascades and would potentially constrain future U.S. power projection efforts in the region. These concerns lay at the heart of the Copenhagen Temptation. We also explore the question of U.S. preventive motivations towards Pakistan in 1978-79. The historical evidence, while incomplete, suggests a strong possibility the Copenhagen Temptation was present.

⁴¹ Not surprisingly, documents detailing aggressive actions towards allies are less likely to be declassified than documents dealing with adversaries; furthermore, former policymakers are more hesitant to go on the record about allies, particularly ones where the U.S. has particularly sensitive relations.

China

The possibility of striking Chinese nuclear facilities grew out of a January 22, 1963 National Security Council meeting, when President Kennedy called China's potential nuclearization "the most serious problem facing the world today." Ambassador-at-large Averell Harriman responded to his grave concern by suggesting that he discuss with the Soviets the possibility of joint action against the PRC. That winter, Paul Nitze ordered and the Joint Chiefs produced options for direct military actions against China, including preventive strikes.⁴² Preparatory documents for Harriman's July trip to Test Ban Treaty negotiations in Moscow further debated the possibility of military strikes against Chinese facilities. They declared a tough stance against the spread of nuclear weapons, to be "the prime question of U.S. national strategy."⁴³ All of these documents acknowledged the possibility that strikes against the Chinese could easily prompt retaliation against U.S. interests or allies in Asia.

Once in Moscow, Harriman received explicit cable instructions from President Kennedy to "elicit Khrushchev's view on means of limiting or preventing Chinese nuclear development and his willingness to either take Soviet action or to accept U.S. action aimed in that direction."⁴⁴ Yet even after the Soviet leader declined these entreaties, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense William Bundy requested from the JCS a contingency plan for striking the Chinese nuclear facilities. When the JCS returned their evaluation in December of that year, they declared the option feasible, but recommended carrying out the strike with nuclear weapons instead.⁴⁵

⁴² "Study of Chinese Vulnerability," Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, April 29, 1963, Briefing Book on US-Soviet Non-Diffusion Agreement for Discussion at the Moscow Meeting, June 1963, National Security Files, Departments and Agencies: ACDA, Box 265, John F. Kennedy Library (Hereafter JFKL).

⁴³ "Can the Genie Be Put Back in the Bottle?" Tab B, Briefing Book on US-Soviet Non-Diffusion Agreement for Discussion at the Moscow Meeting," Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Outgoing Telegram 191, For Governor Harriman from the President," Department of State, 9:01 pm, July 15, 1963, Box 541, Folder 2, Harriman Papers, LOC.

⁴⁵ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Republic of China," February 12, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, Vol. 30, 24, n. 7.

Policymakers, including cabinet-level officials, continued to debate the feasibility and desirability of striking Chinese nuclear facilities throughout 1964.⁴⁶ A September 15 NSC memorandum suggested that joint action with the Soviets remained desirable, and on September 25, Bundy and perhaps Rusk met with Ambassador Dobrynin to once again suggest the possibility of a joint strike, in advance of China's nuclear test.⁴⁷ The same month, the administration debated having Rusk make a public speech suggesting that the U.S. "might take pre-emptive action against ChiCom nuclear facilities."⁴⁸ Henry Rowen stated it would be easy to "destroy the two key ChiCom installations by a limited non-nuclear air attack," and that the "Soviets would approve privately, but might have to raise a to-do publicly."⁴⁹ The so-called Gilpatric Committee, convened by President Johnson after China's nuclear detonation in October 1964, considered seriously the merits of using preventive force to combat the spread of nuclear weapons.⁵⁰ Plans to take out China's nuclear capabilities should they intervene directly in Vietnam were also crafted. "The course of military events vis-a-vis Communist China might give us a defensible case to destroy the Chinese Communist nuclear production capability."⁵¹

⁴⁶ Robert Johnson, "An Exploration of the Possible Bases for Action Against the Chinese Nuclear Facilities," Department of State Policy Planning Council, April 14, 1964, China Memos Vol. I, Dec. 1963-April 1964, National Security Files, Box 237, Lyndon B. Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL); George Rathjens, "Destruction of Chinese Nuclear Weapons Capabilities," ACDA, 14 December 1964, United States, China and the Bomb, Electronic Briefing Book No. 1, National Security Archive.

⁴⁷ McGeorge Bundy, "Memorandum for the Record," September 15, 1964, Memos to the President, Aides File, Box 2, National Security Files, LBJL; "Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," September 15, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 96-99.

⁴⁸ Robert H. Johnson, "The Secretary's Speech on the Far East and the ChiCom Nuclear Problem," September 4, 1964, Lot 85, D240, RG 59, National Archives and Record Administration.

⁴⁹ Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), September 18, 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 97.

⁵⁰ "Problems Concerning Alternative Courses of Action," Personal Papers of Roswell Gilpatric, Box 10, Collateral Documents 1, JFKL.

⁵¹ "Paper Prepared By The National Security Council Working Group: Courses Of Action In Southeast Asia," November 21, 1964, Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1964-1968 Volume I, Vietnam, 1964, Document 418, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d418>; "Memorandum From The Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense," March 2, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-68*, Vietnam Volume 1, 116; "Memorandum From the Acting Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Thompson) to Secretary of State Rusk," July 15, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 187.

Many in the administration believed such an attack would make sense once the November 1964 Presidential election was over.⁵²

Examinations of this 1963 case have tended to emphasize the U.S.'s desire for cooperative action with the Soviets, but documents reveal that the U.S. also seriously considered going it alone. Preparatory materials for the 1963 Test Ban negotiations noted that active Soviet support for direct military action would render it "far more effective than unilateral U.S. action," but analysts were well aware that the prospects of this were dim.⁵³ Test Ban briefing documents also considered the possibility of unilateral U.S. action, as did the JCS analysis produced after the Test Ban summit.⁵⁴ Gilpatric Committee documents discussing possible "Course IV" efforts to halt proliferation also considered that the US might well act unilaterally.⁵⁵ The U.S. also does not appear to have consulted NATO allies or Japan in its 1963-64 preventive calculations.

Despite what preventive war theories suggest, preventive thinking does not appear to have hinged on a perceived shift in the relative balance of power between the U.S. and China. A 1964 NSC memo to Bundy called the prospect of a nuclear China "not much of a military threat, but of some political "scare" potential."⁵⁶ The Gilpatric Committee noted that China's nuclear status and the likelihood that other countries would proliferate in response did not appreciably increase the probability of localized or general war.⁵⁷ Most notably, in 1965 the Joint Chiefs

⁵² Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), September 18, 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 97.

⁵³ "Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara," April 29, 1963, *FRUS 1961-63*, Volume VII, 690; "Tactics and Timing," On Nuclear Diffusion, Volume II: To Govern is to Choose, Prepared by Arthur Barber, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, June 20, 1963, National Security Files, Departments and Agencies: ACDA, Box 265, JFKL.

⁵⁴ "Appendix: Chinese Communist Vulnerability," Briefing Book on US-Soviet Non-Diffusion Agreement for Discussion at the Moscow Meeting, June 1963, National Security Files, Departments and Agencies: ACDA, Box 265, JFKL.

⁵⁵ "Course IV," Personal Papers of Roswell Gilpatric (Hereafter PPRG), Meeting Materials, January 7-8, 1965, Box 10, JFKL.

⁵⁶ Memorandum from Robert W. Komer to the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), February 26, 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 23.

⁵⁷ "Problem Areas," NSF Committee File, Committee on Nuclear Nonproliferation, Box 6, LBJL

remarked “the present ChiCom nuclear capability has not materially affected the existing balance of military power between the United States and Communist China.”⁵⁸

Analysts also explicitly noted an enduring bipolar international system despite China’s nuclearization. The Gilpatric Committee acknowledged the persistence of the U.S. and USSR as the two great powers and suggested a “bi-polar entente” between them “primarily directed towards stopping the spread of nuclear weapons.”⁵⁹ And if U.S. policymakers were undisturbed about the state of the global balance of power, their Soviet counterparts were even more sanguine. During the Test Ban negotiations, Khrushchev noted to Harriman that “he was not concerned even if the Chinese were to [test a nuclear device] soon... There were only two countries which could, because of economic might, solve fully the problem of nuclear weapons, and those countries were the U.S. and USSR” A year later, Ambassador Dobrynin was equally phlegmatic, and argued to Bundy that “Chinese nuclear weapons had no importance against the Soviet Union or against the US and that therefore they had only a psychological impact in Asia.”⁶⁰ If a shifting balance of power was not a pressing concern to either superpower, what was?

Surprisingly, in 1963-64, policymakers concerns appear to have been focused on China’s nuclear capability itself, and did not tend to fixate on the nature of the state or its leadership. Kennedy and Johnson administration officials considered the possibility of using force against *any* emerging nuclear power. In 1964, an analyst suggested the utility of striking Indian facilities, and the Gilpatric Committee debated the possibility of striking the French.⁶¹ And not only did

⁵⁸ Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, January 16, 1965, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 145.

⁵⁹ “A Comparative Rationale for Course III (And Beyond),” PPRG, Box 10, JFKL.

⁶⁰ McGeorge Bundy, “Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin,” September 25, 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 104-105.

⁶¹ “Professor Roger Fisher’s Comments on Selected Portions of Course III,” National Security File, Committee on Nuclear Nonproliferation, Box 5, LBJL, 13.

policymakers engage in equal-opportunity preventive analysis, but they saw opportunities for close cooperation with China once this capability was eliminated.

As decision-makers contemplated military action against China in 1964, they acknowledged that these strikes alone could not neutralize a nuclear capability indefinitely and that diplomatic engagement with China would become necessary. An improved relationship might include the establishment of trade relations, diplomatic recognition, cooperation on arms control agreements and the offer of a seat on the UN Security Council. Some analyses suggested that this diplomatic approach was naturally at odds with the idea of preventive action.⁶² Others argued that the two were entirely consistent, and might well constitute an ideal US policy.⁶³ If policymakers could envision substantially improved bilateral relations, then, conflict with China in any broader sense does not appear to have been inevitable. The perceived threat was China's nuclear capability, not its wider intentions.

Furthermore, China's potential nuclearization was perceived to be dangerous for reasons that were not exclusively dyadic. Following China's October 16, 1964 test, the future spread of nuclear weapons was of the utmost concern. "One of the most important consequences of that detonation, perhaps the most important, will be its probable effect on the spread of nuclear weapons," noted one analyst. "The balance of factors so far has tended to retard proliferation. There is reason to doubt the stability of the situation in light of the Chinese event."⁶⁴

U.S. policymakers were gravely concerned that China's test would have rapid and widespread consequences worldwide.⁶⁵ Many saw the reactive nuclearization of both Japan and

⁶² "Problems Concerning Alternative Courses of Action," PPRG Box 11, JFKL.

⁶³ Professor Roger Fisher's Comments on Selected Portions of Course III," NSF Committee File, Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, Box 5, LBJL.

⁶⁴ Henry Rowen, "Effects of the Chinese Bomb on Nuclear Spread," November 2, 1964, National Security Files, Committee on Nonproliferation, Box 5, LBJL.

⁶⁵ "Probable Consequences of IV All-Out Efforts to Stop Proliferation," PPRG, Box 10, JFKL.

India as nearly inevitable. Beyond these, Pakistan, Australia, Indonesia, Israel, Egypt, Sweden, South Africa, Germany and Italy were all identified as countries that might seek the bomb in response to the new Chinese capability.⁶⁶

Indeed, policymakers argued that preventive strikes could have a demonstrative effect on other potential proliferators. Several analysts observed that the “elimination of Chinese capability would be a powerful lesson to Nth nations.”⁶⁷ As Henry Rowen pointed out, a U.S. preventive attack might create “in the rest of the world ... considerable fear—also some feeling that the US was punishing a smaller power for getting into the nuclear business. Was this necessarily bad, however?” Even the most vigorous voice within the administration against a preventive attack, Robert Johnson, “found the stimulus to proliferation the strongest argument for pre-empting the ChiComs.”⁶⁸ Gilpatric Committee documents noted the importance of applying U.S. nonproliferation policy broadly and uniformly to forestall further nuclearization, and submitted that preventive attacks against several nuclearizing countries would suggest an even-handed policy.⁶⁹

The potential for a proliferation cascade raised concerns about the U.S. imperative to establish and maintain credible nuclear guarantees. The utility of security guarantees to India and Japan, the top candidates for reactive proliferation, was quickly acknowledged.⁷⁰ Failing to prevent China from going nuclear would lead to “greatly increased pressure on us for new aid commitments, and major counter-efforts on the part of those Asians who felt themselves

⁶⁶ “Tentative Thoughts on Certain Proliferation Problems,” December 4, 1964, PPRG, Box 10, JFKL; Henry Rowen, “Effects of the Chinese Bomb on Nuclear Spread,” November 2, 1964, National Security Files, Committee on Nonproliferation, Box 5, LBJL.

⁶⁷ “Probable Consequences of IV All-Out Efforts to Stop Proliferation,” PPRG, Box 10, JFKL; Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), September 18, 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. 30, 97.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Roger Fisher, “Problem Areas and Suggested Assignments,” November 26, 1964, National Security Files, Committee on Nonproliferation, Box 5, LBJL.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

menaced.” If the U.S. did not back all existing mutual defense commitments, it would “have to retreat into isolation.” The need to make these commitments credible in the face of a nuclear China “might be the deciding factor driving us into a \$30 billion AICBM program or a huge civil defense effort.”⁷¹

The notion that a Chinese bomb and its consequences would constrain U.S. freedom of action in the region was of the utmost concern to policymakers. Early in 1962, Kennedy himself inquired, “when the Chinese get missiles and bombs and nuclear weapons, for example, what effect will that have on our dispositions in Southeast Asia?”⁷² Analysts speculated that China would use nuclear weapons as an “umbrella for overt nonnuclear military operations and support for insurgency,” as well as general freedom of action in the region.⁷³ Well before the Chinese test occurred, there existed a profound fear that a nuclear PRC would be highly detrimental to “U.S. overseas bases, the deployment of forces and contingency plans for military operations,” in this area of interest.⁷⁴ Indeed, policymakers feared that the effect of the Chinese nuclear test on American policy in Vietnam would be a profound one:

“A U.S. defeat in Southeast Asia may come to be attributed in part to the unwillingness of the U.S. to take on North Vietnam supported by a China that now has the bomb. Such

⁷¹Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), September 18, 1964, *FRUS 1964-68*, Vol. XXX, 97; “Minutes of Briefing by Secretary McNamara on Issues Related to Proliferation,” January 7, 1965, Personal Papers of Roswell Gilpatric, Box 10, JFKL.

⁷²“Summary of the President’s Remarks to the National Security Council,” January 18, 1962, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, NSC Meetings 1962, JFKL.

⁷³“On Nuclear Diffusion: Volume II, To Govern is to Choose,” 20 June 1963, Prepared by Arthur Barber, Deputy Assistance Secretary of Defense, National Security Files, Departments: ACDA, Box 265, JFKL, 2; “China as a Nuclear Power: Some Thoughts Prior to the Chinese Test,” October 7, 1964, National Security File, Committee on Nonproliferation Box 5, LBJL.

⁷⁴George C. McGhee, “Program to Influence World Opinion with Respect to a ChiCom Nuclear Detonation,” September 24, 1962, United States, China and the Bomb, Electronic Briefing Book No. 1, National Security Archive.

a defeat is now much more significant to countries near China than it was before October 16.”⁷⁵

The fact that a key mechanism from the preventive war literature—a shifting balance of power—does not appear to have concerned policymakers is surprising. The fact that other potential proliferators were considered as targets and cooperation with the Chinese was desirable once their weapons were eliminated also sheds light on these as capabilities-based concerns. Indeed, policymakers saw the Chinese bomb as having limited military value of its own, yet the potential consequences for proliferation and U.S. power projection were grave enough to generate the Absolute Copenhagen Temptation in 1963-64.

North Korea

Thirty years later, preventive war plans were also initiated at the Presidential level and debated vigorously for well over a year by cabinet officials, leading to detailed military plans. This time, the target was North Korea’s emerging nuclear program. Concerted preventive thinking commenced in early 1993, when Secretary of Defense Les Aspin convened a North Korean task force. The task force produced two highly-classified papers in the spring of that year, and both were authored by Philip Zelikow and presented to the National Security Council. The first concluded that the DPRK should not be permitted to produce any more nuclear weapons beyond the one or two it might already have; the second declared that preventive air strikes could indeed level the Yongbyon facilities.⁷⁶ By the autumn of 1993, Secretary of

⁷⁵ Henry Rowen, “Effects of the Chinese Bomb on Nuclear Spread,” November 2, 1964, National Security Files, Committee on Nonproliferation, Box 5, LBJL.

⁷⁶ Interview with Philip Zelikow, New York, July 8, 2010.

Defense William Perry had begun to consider seriously military options, and formally requested that plans for air strikes to destroy Yongbyon be drawn up.⁷⁷

Clinton administration officials readily understood that bombing Yongbyon could lead to conventional North Korean retaliation. Because of this specter of larger war on the Peninsula and the daunting DPRK artillery on the DMZ, the White House authorized a Patriot battalion deployment in late 1993, which the DPRK claimed was part of the American plan to launch an offensive war.⁷⁸ The North also insisted that it would consider economic sanctions an act of war, and by late April, the Clinton administration believed military engagement to be a distinct possibility.⁷⁹

When the DPRK began to discharge the Yongbyon reactor in May and withdrew from the IAEA in June, the crisis reached a fever pitch. By mid-June, special sessions of the JCS had drafted military deployment options for the President, including a contingency that required deploying 50,000 additional troops, 400 aircraft, over 50 ships, and multiple rocket launchers.⁸⁰ Once significant deployments were authorized, the US would also have to call up reserve troops and evacuate 100,000 American citizens from the South.

At June 14-16 meetings of the Principals' Committee, the President also considered three different preventive strike plans. The US could target just the reprocessing facility; Strikes could take out all of Yongbyon, including the reactor and the spent fuel pool; an attack could also aim to take out other DPRK military assets that would impede the North's ability to retaliate militarily, in addition to all of Yongbyon.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Lyle J. Goldstein, *Preventive Attack and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 134.

⁷⁸ Interview with Robert Gallucci, Chicago, July 26, 2010.

⁷⁹ Interview with former High-Level Clinton Administration Official, Washington DC, August 2, 2010.

⁸⁰ Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2004), 205; Interview with Robert Gallucci.

⁸¹ Wit et al., 210.

President Clinton's decision on the conventional deployments and possible preventive action was obviated by a phone call from Jimmy Carter, saying he had convinced the DPRK to keep inspectors in place. Officials present at that meeting have asserted that without this concession Clinton most certainly would have authorized a significant military buildup on June 16.⁸² A televised Presidential announcement explaining these actions was in the works, as were plans for a reserve call-up.⁸³ Had the North responded by ejecting inspectors and moved towards reprocessing, Secretary Perry also may well have recommended preventive strikes on Yongbyon.⁸⁴

The U.S.'s preventive planning in 1994 was precluded by Carter's diplomatic breakthrough, but by mid-June of that year, Clinton administration officials had not consulted their South Korean allies about the possible use of preventive force. The ROK had emphasized the need to proceed cautiously throughout the crisis, and for operational reasons there is simply no way the U.S. could have attacked Yongbyon without informing Seoul.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, a key player in the crisis has suggested that the U.S. may not have required the express permission of its ally to strike the facilities.⁸⁶ Two scholars have also argued that preventive strike contemplation proceeded despite strong disapproval and ambiguous threats from the Chinese.⁸⁷ Clearly, the Copenhagen Temptation was strong enough to motivate possible unilateral action.

Even more than in the Chinese case, it is clear that U.S. policymakers did not view their potential target as a threat to the overall balance of power in 1994. Key Clinton administration negotiators perceived North Korean nuclear development to be at least partially motivated by the

⁸² Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington DC: Brookings, 1999), 129; Wit et. al., 242; Interview with Robert Gallucci.

⁸³ Wit et. al., 243.

⁸⁴ Interview with Robert Gallucci; Interview with William Perry.

⁸⁵ Interview with William Perry.

⁸⁶ Interview with Robert Gallucci.

⁸⁷ Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 118; Goldstein, 135.

overwhelming display of U.S. conventional force during the 1991 Gulf War. Additionally, the collapse of the USSR in 1991 had left the DPRK an isolated vestige of communism, and marked an end to crucial oil imports. The North had experienced an increase in political isolation as China and Russia normalized relations with South Korea.⁸⁸ By all accounts, U.S. policymakers understood the DPRK to be a state in desperate decline. This was not an adversary with the potential to truly disrupt the military balance, nor did the North pose a direct military threat.⁸⁹ “I must say I was never concerned about North Korea putting a nuclear weapon on a missile and firing it at the United States,” recalled William Perry.⁹⁰

And since the U.S. had removed all its nuclear weapons from South Korea by late 1991, the North Korean program was clearly not an effort to close a gap in the nuclear balance on the peninsula. Furthermore, if U.S. policymakers had clearly understood that China’s nuclearization had a negligible real impact on the global balance of power, there can be little doubt that the Hermit Kingdom’s ambitions were even less of a concern. Put simply, a substantial shift in the dyadic balance of power was not occurring here. The DPRK was the consummate feeble state.

As in the China case, policymakers appear to have been most concerned about a DPRK nuclear capability itself. Longstanding enmity between the U.S. and North Korea no doubt factored into policymakers’ concerns in 1993 and 1994, but the image of the North as a pernicious, erratic “rogue” state did not drive preventive fears. “I always based my thinking on the assumption that the North Koreans were perfectly rational,” recalled William Perry. “Their principal criterion was always survival of the regime.”⁹¹

⁸⁸Marion Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis: Jimmy Carter, The Power of a Peacemaker, and North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 3.

⁸⁹ Wit et al., 34-35.

⁹⁰ Interview with William Perry

⁹¹ Interview with William Perry.

In the North Korean case, consideration of preventive action proceeded alongside diplomatic efforts to keep it nonnuclear with positive inducements. Upon first discovering nuclear installations in the late 1980s, the Bush administration initiated a policy of engagement, in hopes that an end to isolation would obviate the DPRK's nuclear aspirations.⁹² The 1994 Agreed Framework included joint U.S.-DPRK resolutions to move towards normalized political and economic relations, to secure a non-nuclear Korean peninsula, and to strengthen the international nonproliferation regime. Officials involved in the 1994 crisis have suggested that if preventive strikes had been launched, the U.S. likely would have sought diplomatic reconciliation shortly thereafter, similar to 1964 China analyses.⁹³

That the U.S. coupled the potential use of preventive force with the possibility of recognition and long-term nonproliferation cooperation is once again telling. If, indeed, policy was being driven by Kim Il Sung's intransigent aggression, then near-term normalization and cooperation should not have seemed so very appealing. This bifurcated policy of prevention and partnership suggests that U.S. policymakers were driven primarily by a desire to neutralize the nascent DPRK nuclear capability.

Indeed, it was once again the broader consequences of the North Korean capability that appears to have been of the utmost concern to Clinton Administration officials. Policymakers expressed fears that a nuclear North Korea would inspire further proliferation and constrain US action in the region, much as they had in 1963-64. DPRK nuclearization might inspire Japan, Taiwan or South Korea to develop their own weapons, and the US had already put significant effort into keeping her East Asian allies nonnuclear.⁹⁴ This tipping point anxiety was inextricably

⁹² Wit et. al., 7.

⁹³ Interview with Robert Gallucci.

⁹⁴ Testimony of Ashton Carter, The Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Tuesday, February 4, 2003, Available at: belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/.../020403senateforeignrelationscommitteetestimony.pdf.

linked to policymakers' fears about the credibility of U.S. nuclear guarantees in the region. The American nuclear umbrella was sound as long as the United States could attack North Korea without risk to its own territory. But a nuclear North Korea could lead US protégés in Asia to feel less confident in longstanding nuclear guarantees, and if the credibility of U.S. guarantees was diminished, an East Asian arms race could ensue.⁹⁵

Beyond these regional consequences, Clinton administration officials believed that a nuclear North Korea could have global ramifications and set the terrifying precedent of proliferation by smaller powers in the post-Cold War world.⁹⁶ “One of our chief concerns was the example they would set,” recalled Secretary Perry.⁹⁷ Those involved worried that North Korea’s nuclearization would shatter the NPT, which was up for a 25-year review and indefinite extension in 1995.⁹⁸ In short, the global nonproliferation regime was believed to hang in the balance.

A potential cascade might have a profound effect on the future of U.S. interests in the region. While many Clinton Administration officials acknowledged that North Korean nuclear use seemed unlikely, they feared that the DPRK might be emboldened by its new status, and diminish the U.S. coercive presence on the DMZ.⁹⁹ Additionally, if South Korea or Japan did decide to go nuclear in response, the U.S.’s nuclear umbrella, and thus presence in East Asia, could become redundant. And even in 1994, policymakers were concerned that North Korean nuclearization would encourage the same from Iran.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Interview with former high-level Clinton Administration official.

⁹⁶ Wit et. al., 64-65.

⁹⁷ Interview with William Perry.

⁹⁸ Wit et. al., xvi.

⁹⁹ Interview with Former High-Level Clinton Administration Official.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with William Perry.

Once again, a dyadic shift in the aggregate balance of power was clearly not at issue in this 1994 case. The DPRK's nuclear capability itself was the focus of concern. If it was neutralized, then a vast improvement in relations could be possible. If it was not, a proliferation cascade and a constrained United States could result. Like the Chinese case, then, the 1994 North Korean episode suggests that U.S. preventive considerations against emerging nuclear powers – the Copenhagen Temptation – may have motivations that depart substantially from theoretical expectation.

The Question of Pakistan

It is clear that the United States seriously considered preventive action against Chinese and North Korean nuclear programs, and that both cases of the CT were largely motivated by capabilities-based, non-dyadic concerns. Is the CT only activated against adversaries of the United States, or states we consider so-called “rogue” regimes? In fact, there are tantalizing hints that the CT played some role in U.S. policy towards its ally Pakistan in 1978-79. Although preventive considerations against Pakistan may not have as pervasive as those against North Korea or China, the strong suggestion of CT motivations demonstrates that many of the same capabilities-based, non-dyadic concerns may have been at play.

Despite their longstanding alliance, concerns about possible Pakistani nuclearization were strong in the late 1970s. In 1978, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance requested a study exploring the consequences of air strikes against Pakistan's nuclear facility.¹⁰¹ The following year, President Carter assigned Special Representative for Nonproliferation Gerard Smith and the State

¹⁰¹ Appendices for Matthew Fuhrmann and Sarah E. Kreps, “Targeting Nuclear Programs in War and Peace: A Quantitative Empirical Analysis, 1942-2000,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 18, accessed at http://www.npolicy.org/article_file/Appendices_for_Matthew_Fuhrmann_and_Susan_E_Kreps-Targeting_Nuclear_Programs_280211_1213.pdf

Department's Robert Gallucci to investigate Islamabad's nuclear ambitions and explore possible avenues for roll back. Gallucci quickly produced an intelligence estimate that suggested the Pakistani program was much more advanced than previously recognized, and Smith traveled to Vienna to communicate concerns to the IAEA.¹⁰²

High-level meetings were convened during the summer of 1979 to discuss policy options. Several accounts suggest that military strikes on Kahuta were explored, and the Pentagon developed contingency plans.¹⁰³ Brent Scowcroft or Secretary of State Cyrus Vance may have initiated the proposal.¹⁰⁴ Joe Nye and Gerard Smith are both reported to have authored reports laying out these options, and Smith's correspondence from the summer makes reference to an "Operation Smash."¹⁰⁵ A New York Times article from that August also quoted a White House official saying that sabotage or commando raids were being considered.¹⁰⁶ And the debate over possible policy options most certainly included President Carter.¹⁰⁷ In September 1979, members of the U.S. General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament suggested that the U.S. government should consider an "Entebbe Two" assault on Kahuta, referring to a secret Israeli mission to rescue hostages.¹⁰⁸ Secretary of State Vance may have made veiled

¹⁰² Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark, *Deception: Pakistan, The United States and the Secret Trade in Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007), 64-65

¹⁰³ Mark Hibbs, "Pakistan's Bomb: Mission Impossible," Book Reviews, *Nonproliferation Review* (Vol. 15, No. 2, July 2008), pp. 387-388.; Fuhrmann and Kreps, Appendices, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Levy and Scott-Clark, 65; Gordon Corera, *Shopping for Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity and the Rise and Fall of the AQ Khan Network* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28.

¹⁰⁵ Corera, 28; Note from Gerard Smith, "can I talk about "smash" to my chums in Vienna on Pakistan," June 19th, 1979, Gerard C. Smith papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, box 55.

¹⁰⁶ Levy and Scott-Clark, 67.

¹⁰⁷ Levy and Scott-Clark, 70.

¹⁰⁸ During a September 14th, 1979 meeting of the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament, Charles Van Doren responded to this suggestion by stating, "Well, we were a little bit hindered by the fact that Mr. Burke of *The New York Times* thought of that solution, dreamed it up and put it in *The New York Times* article which played in the Pakistani press very hard, and led some in this government to immediately deny that it was under active consideration, so our denial was true. But it makes it harder to consider that as an option when Mr. Burke thought it up and publicly exposed it, and had it categorically denied." In other words, while Van Doren claimed there was no strike plan, the *Times* articles made it much more difficult to move in that direction should they want to. "General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament," September 14th, 1979, p. 15 accessed from

threats of U.S. military action during his meeting with Pakistani Foreign Affairs Advisor Agha Shahi.¹⁰⁹

Smith's 1979 analysis of the effects of a Pakistani bomb followed the Copenhagen Temptation logic closely. A Pakistan with nuclear weapons "is the sharpest challenge to the international structure since 1945." If Pakistan persists with its "Moslem bomb" India would develop one too, as would West Germany and Japan. And even at the height of superpower tensions, Smith argued the United States should take advantage of the fact "the Soviets would be interested in playing a serious role in stopping this development."¹¹⁰ Several months later he noted that "Pakistan is the most dangerous situation we face" and "a Soviet interest in solving the Pakistan situation would be constructive."¹¹¹ U.S. officials followed the CT logic of contemplating both carrots and sticks, simultaneously considering both "strikes against nuclear facilities and the extension of security guarantees" during the same high level policy meeting.¹¹² And remarkably, analysts considered the value of a US-initiated operation despite the fact that Israel and India were both considering preventive strikes of their own.¹¹³

The National Security Archives online document collection, "The United States and Pakistan's Quest for the Bomb," posted December 10, 2010, accessed at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm#25>

¹⁰⁹ Leonard S. Spector, *Nuclear Proliferation Today* (Carnegie Endowment, Vintage Books: New York, 1984), accessed at <http://www.acamedia.info/politics/nonproliferation/spectorNN84/pakiraq.htm#36>.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum to the Deputy Secretary, March 27, 1979, accessed from *The National Security Archives* online document collection, "The United States and Pakistan's Quest for the Bomb," posted December 10, 2010, accessed at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm#25>.

¹¹¹ May 24, 1979, Gerard Smith to Bob Gallucci, Gerard C. Smith papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, box 55.

¹¹² Fuhrmann and Kreps, Appendices, p. 18. It is also clear in the National Security Archives documents of this period that the Carter administration considered a mix of carrots (economic aid, conventional military sales) and sticks (sanctions, cut off of aid) in their effort to prevent a nuclear Pakistan from emerging. See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm#25>

¹¹³ "The United States and Pakistan's Quest for the Bomb," posted December 10, 2010, accessed at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm#25>. The reference to "Entebbe Two" acknowledges that Israel might have preventive strike plans for Pakistan's nascent nuclear weapons program. Paul Doty tells Van Doren "The Israelis are the most highly motivated among our friends, with respect to doing something." *Ibid.*, p. 12. Around the same time, U.S. officials were aware of India's promise to "smash it" if Pakistan's tested a nuclear device. See Morning Meeting – June 29, 1979," Memorandum by Richard Lehman, NIO [National Intelligence Officer] for Warning, Secret Source: National Archives, CIA Research Tool, and U.S. embassy New Delhi cable 9979, "India and the Pakistan Nuclear Problem," 7 June 1979, Secret Source:, both accessed from *The National*

Despite the fact that the US and Pakistan were longstanding military allies, this analysis suggests serious alarm about a Pakistani nuclear capability, and the wider structural effects Pakistan's nuclearization could unleash. Ultimately, the preventive thinking may not have endured in the Carter administration because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹¹⁴ But the fact that a serious preventive temptation may have emerged against a close partner is striking and is worthy of further exploration. If in fact the Carter Administration did indeed consider preventive action consistent with our standard, it would indicate that the CT is a phenomenon that may target allies as well as adversaries. Moreover, the analysis from the summer of 1979 indicates the same non-dyadic, structural concerns that appeared in both the Chinese and North Korean cases drove preventive thinking against Pakistan.

The Pakistani example also suggests something else important about the Copenhagen Temptation. Similar to China, the United States considered cooperating with the Soviet Union, despite severely strained relations at the time, to prevent proliferation. In the North Korean case, no such desire to cooperate with other powers was evident. But in 1994, there were no other great power that rivaled the US in global position. The systemic concerns that drove CT were believed to be the primary responsibility of the unipolar United States.

III. The Copenhagen Temptation and the Deterrence Dominance Revolution

U.S. policy towards China, North Korea and even Pakistan reveals that the Copenhagen Temptation is not caused by a shift in the traditional measures of the balance of

Security Archives online document collection, "The United States and Pakistan's Quest for the Bomb," posted December 10, 2010, accessed at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm#25>

¹¹⁴ Levy and Scott-Clark, 70.

power, nor is it a consequence of balance of threat considerations.¹¹⁵ The CT is driven by the leading power worries over the systemic effects of the spread of nuclear weapons. How can we make theoretical sense of this strong and enduring anti-proliferation temptation?

A robust literature on preventive war has identified incentives for a power to strike to forestall an adverse power shift, but it does not acknowledge the profound and permanent nature of the shift that comes with nuclear weapons acquisition. Proliferation scholars, on the other hand, have recognized that the deterrent dominant nature of nuclear weapons may be harmful to leading powers. Matthew Kroenig argues:

“Power-projecting states, states with the ability to project conventional military power over a particular target, have a lot to lose when that target state acquires nuclear weapons... Once that state acquires nuclear weapons, however, this strategic advantage is certainly placed at risk and may be fully lost. For these reasons, power-projecting states fear nuclear proliferation to both allied and enemy states.”¹¹⁶

The overwhelming deterrent characteristics of nuclear weapons undercut a leading power’s broad and commanding superiority in other categories of power on issues of war and peace, and a world with more deterrence is a world where the United States is more

¹¹⁵ Any measurement of the balance of threat is predicated on four key pillars: aggregate power, proximity of power, offensive capability and offensive intentions. In none of these cases was this a compelling explanation for U.S. preventive motivation. China, Pakistan, and North Korea are separated from the United States by the world’s largest ocean, most international relations theorists have argued nuclear weapons have significant defensive or deterrent, as opposed to offensive, qualities, and we have already established that in neither case were aggregate power perceptions affected. Finally, following their nuclearization, neither China nor North Korea expressed intentions of a more offensive nature than they had before; if anything, China became less aggressive. For an explanation of the balance of threat, see Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985), 3-43.

¹¹⁶ Matthew Kroenig *Exporting the Bomb: Technology Transfer and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, 3.

constrained. Furthermore, feeble powers with nuclear weapons may also be more willing to pursue risky, brinkmanship strategies in crises with an otherwise powerful United States.¹¹⁷ As Michael Horowitz explains, a feeble state “possessing even a single nuclear weapon influences America’s strategic calculations and seems to make coercive success harder.”¹¹⁸ Finally, U.S. policymakers feared an emerging nuclear power could set off a “tipping point” or proliferation cascade, further undermining the leader power’s ability to project power in a region.

What these insights imply, however, is something more than great power constraint and systemic stability. They suggest a strong incentive for a power-projecting system leader to take serious action – and be willing to pay a high price -- to *prevent* nuclearization from occurring.

Unlike other capabilities changes, nuclear weapons acquisition does not produce a linear shift in a relative power relationship: policy makers in 1994 were *not* concerned that North Korea would acquire more ability to project military power *against* the United States. Rather, nuclearization is a binary change, and once achieved, great power intervention in a feeble state’s affairs becomes nearly impossible. It could also launch a nuclear chain reaction that would dramatically erode if not eliminate a leading power’s standing and ability to project power in a particular region. A country like the United States is therefore tempted to act while it can—not because *it* will be relatively vulnerable later, but because its target, or even an entire region, will become *invulnerable* because of proliferation. Power relations will not so much shift, as preventive war models posit, as they will become fixed.

¹¹⁷ As Marc Trachtenberg argues, in a nuclear world, the system can reward bad behavior, even by the weak: “In a world of invulnerable nuclear forces, as Waltz points out, the military balance counts for little. The result is that in such a world there would be a great premium on resolve, on risk-taking, and perhaps ultimately on recklessness. In international politics, as in other areas of life, what you reward is what you get.” Marc Trachtenberg, Review of Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, in *The National Interest*, Fall 2002, accessed at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/cv.html> For an application of Trachtenberg’s argument to U.S. policy towards Iraq, see Stanley Kurtz, “Brave New World: Why we must invade Iraq,” *National Review Online*, September 16, 2002, <http://old.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz091602.asp>

¹¹⁸ Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power*, p. 106.

Scholars of IR theory have long appreciated the revolutionary character of the nuclear age and the changes in statecraft that accompany it. The CT reveals, however, that the deterrent dominant nature of the nuclear age has produced another revolution of its own. Great powers have long been accustomed to interfering in the affairs of smaller states through the use of coercion. The territorial sovereignty of weaker powers has always been violable for those with sufficient capabilities.¹¹⁹ For a leading power interested in power projection, therefore, the promise of long-term invulnerability of even a feeble state creates short-term, and potentially destabilizing incentives for action. For a country like the United States, a future with one more nuclear power—*any* additional nuclear power-- does *not* “look like the present.”¹²⁰ As Richard Betts has pointed out, what may be good for the “system” – deterrence dominance -- may not be what the United States prefers. “If nuclear spread enhances stability, this is not entirely good news for the United States, since it has been accustomed to attacking small countries with impunity when it felt justified and provoked.”¹²¹

Bernard Brodie wisely observed that, "a policy of preventive war has always been 'unrealistic' in the American democracy" because "war is generally unpopular, and the public mood inclines to support action only in response to great anger or great fright. The fright must be something more dramatic than a sudden new rise in the adversary's capability."¹²² Indeed, the recurrent fright that spawns the Copenhagen Temptation is something far greater than the relative shift in the material balance. It is the deterrent consequence of that permanent change—

¹¹⁹ See Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 20.

¹²⁰ Van Evera, 245. Jack Levy does suggest crossing the nuclear threshold is a particularly strong form of the same dyadic power shift that motivates conventional preventive war.

¹²¹ Richard K. Betts, “Universal Deterrence or Conceptual Collapse? Liberal Pessimism and Utopian Realism,” in Victor A. Utgoff, ed, *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Interests, and World Order* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 65. In other words, the international system may prefer Waltz, but the United States – and any system leading power – will prefer Sagan, albeit for reasons other than those he laid out.

¹²² Quote from Randall L. Schweller, *Domestic Structures and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?* *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Jan 1992), p. 242.

for a leading power, a sudden, dramatic and permanent limitation on its own power and a barrier to coercive endeavors in the future.

This brings up a final point – the CT is just the most extreme policy on a continuum of aggressive nuclear non-proliferation policies the United States has considered over the past seven decades against foe and friend alike. Alliances, missile defense, and security guarantees have been important tools in the U.S. nonproliferation arsenal, as has international treaties and regimes. But the system’s leading power has not hesitated to use stronger medicine if needed. In the 1960s, for example, the U.S. put extraordinary pressure on Israel to drop its nuclear program, made it clear to West German that their acquisition of nuclear weapons was unthinkable, and even contemplated pressuring the British to abandon their atomic program.¹²³ During the 1970s, allies Taiwan, South Korea, and Pakistan were threatened with the disruption of the sale of sensitive technology, freezes in economic aid, and promises to cut off fuel supplies if they went nuclear.¹²⁴ In the case of Pakistan, the US issued “some 300” demarches to European, Middle Eastern, and East Asian governments in an effort to halt sensitive exports and slow the program. American efforts caused Pakistan “serious design and fabrication problems” and “resulted in the denial of key technology and equipment.”¹²⁵ South Korea and Taiwan were

¹²³ On West Germany, see Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1946-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); on Israel, see Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); on the desire of many top U.S. policymakers to get the British out of the nuclear business, see Richard Neustadt, *Report to JFK: The Skybolt Crisis in Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹²⁴ On Pakistan, see. “Congressional Consultation on Pakistan,” State Department Cable 235372 to US Embassy, Vienna, 15 September 1978, p. 3-4. National Security Archive, Pakistan Nuclear Development Collection. On South Korea and Taiwan, see Lewis A. Dunn, “Half Past India’s Bang,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 36 (Autumn 1979), p. 79, 83, 88.

¹²⁵ “Ambassador’s Talk with General Zia,” Embassy Islamabad cable to State Department, 5 September 1978, p. 1-3, National Security Archive, Pakistani Nuclear Development; “Report on Diplomatic Action Taken Concerning Foreign, Nuclear-Related Supplies to Pakistan,” Richard L. Williamson, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, p. 2 National Security Archive, Pakistani Nuclear Development.

threatened with an end to their alliance with the United States, a measure that would have exposed both countries to great peril.¹²⁶

Though all of these measures fall short of actual CT thinking, they are nonetheless striking examples of how aggressively the U.S seeks to inhibit nuclear proliferation by friend and foe alike. As we have seen, a leading state has powerful incentives to prevent the spread of a weapon that severely limits its own freedom to act in the world.

Conclusion

At first blush, the willingness of the United States to seriously consider the use of force to prevent otherwise feeble states from acquiring nuclear weapons is a puzzle for realism. It is part of a larger puzzle, however – why has the leading state in the system aggressively sought to use both carrots and sticks to limit the spread of nuclear weapons over the past seven decades, when much of our theoretical and historical work suggests these awesome weapons stabilize the international system through deterrence dominance? Many security studies scholars believe that an “exaggerated fear of proliferation has become an even bigger problem than proliferation itself.”¹³²

Nor is the Copenhagen Temptation, or the fears that drive it, fading from view. The Obama administration has made halting and reversing nuclear proliferation a top priority of U.S. strategy.¹³³ To achieve this goal, the administration has pursued a number of policies, including

¹²⁶ Rebecca K.C. Hersmann and Robert Peters, “Nuclear U-Turns: Learning From South Korean and Taiwanese Rollback,” *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol 13. No. 3 (November 2006), p .547-548.

¹³² Jacques Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Science, Politics, and Proliferation*, book manuscript, March 2011, p. 4.

¹³³ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf, 23-24.

strengthening the NPT and revising the United States nuclear posture. But similar to administrations before it, President Obama has not ruled out using force to forestall or eliminate nascent nuclear programs. Threats of preventive military action have focused on two feeble states – Iran and North Korea – who otherwise have little ability to project economic, soft, or conventional military power beyond their near abroad. Grave worries about tipping points or proliferation cascades are highlighted as a primary concern. This comes only several years after the George W. Bush administration fought what many claim was a preventive war to eliminate the nuclear program of another feeble state, Iraq.

What explains this seeming gap between IR theory and the repeated concerns of U.S. policymakers? To be sure, it could be argued that policymakers have been needlessly worried and exaggerated the threat.¹³⁴ But serious calculations about preventive war, and aggressive policies to halt nuclear proliferation, have persisted among top officials across decades, administrations, and party affiliation, to say nothing of the transformation of the international system. Clearly something more is at work.

The real answer to this puzzle lies in understanding the profound effect nuclear proliferation brings to the international system and the challenge this poses to the leading power in the system. The United States has had and will continue to possess the world's largest and most innovative economy, overwhelming conventional military superiority, command of the air, sea and space, favorable geography, and considerable soft power. In a world without nuclear weapons, the United States has no peer, and would have almost complete freedom to act as it sees fit. A world in which nuclearization reduces or even cancels out many of these extraordinary advantages – and potentially rewards nuclear brinkmanship -- is one in which U.S. policymakers will go to great lengths to prevent. Deterrence dominance may be more stable for

¹³⁴ Gavin, "Same As It Ever Was."

some – particularly states with no ability to project power -- but unappealing for a leading power whose freedom to act is seriously constrained. This, incidentally, might explain why so many American policymakers – as opposed to security studies scholars – actively embrace the global zero movement to eliminate all nuclear weapons.¹³⁵ The United States has far more relative power in a non-nuclear, non-deterrent dominant world.

There is still much more work to be done to understand the appeal of the Copenhagen Temptation to U.S. policymakers.¹³⁶ One of the most important tasks in front of us is to better understand why policymakers were so sensitive to the effects of nuclearization on their assessments of power.¹³⁷ Most security studies scholars are understandably wary of if not downright opposed to preventive military policies. But if one is to construct a convincing case against this recourse, it is important to recognize that these powerful motivations have been prevalent since 1945 and exist a part of a larger continuum of policies to inhibit the spread of nuclear weapons. Until we not only identify and explain the root causes driving preventive calculations in the nuclear age, policymakers and academics alike will be hard-pressed to argue against these controversial policies.

¹³⁵ In such a world, not only would the other elements of the U.S.'s preponderant non-nuclear power provide it with enormous advantages over everyone else in the system; its enormous nuclear infrastructure and technological know-how would make it the power who could most easily reconstitute its nuclear weapons, making it a de facto nuclear power. In a sense, it could be argued this would make the United States what Mearsheimer calls a hegemon with no great power rivals with which to compete for security. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 128.

¹³⁶ Stephen Brooks William Worlforth make a related plea. “Do robust second-strike nuclear capabilities constrain U.S. actions that do not bear on other states’ core territorial security? What is the constraining effect of small, nonsurvivable nuclear arsenals, and/or arsenals with little or no capacity to strike the United States? These are the relevant questions, yet they have hardly figured in research and theorizing by IR scholars.” Stephen G. Brooks and Willaim C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 209.

¹³⁷ Some scholars suggest that the balance of power does require some redefinition in the nuclear age. Waltz makes note of but does not elaborate on the fact that a shift in the nuclear balance is fundamentally different than a conventional shift; Levy terms crossing the nuclear threshold a “step-level power shift”; Debs and Monteiro define the balance of power exclusively in terms of the nuclear balance, but without remarking on this decision. Whether the balance of power and nuclear balance are synonymous, however, is far from established and is worthy of serious scholarly scrutiny (See Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: WW Norton, 2003), 138-139; Jack S. Levy, “Preventive War and Democratic Politics,” 7; Alexandre Debs and Nuno Montiero, “Nothing to Fear But Fear Itself?: Nuclear Proliferation and Preventive War,” Yale University Working Paper, November 5, 2010).