

## **21st Century Nuclear Proliferation in Asia and the Politics of World Security: The Complexity of Security Dilemma in East and South Asia**

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### **Abstract**

Nuclear proliferation has been the cynosure of international debate since it was first tested during the early period of the Cold War. Of major concern is how Asia is gradually becoming a nuclear weapon zone. Many of its populous nations such as China, India, Pakistan, Japan, (and North-Korea) have sought to obtain nuclear weapons for security and status. Interestingly, the more these states seek to concretize their security through nuclear proliferation, the more they create security dilemma which in turn further exacerbates its wanton spread. Giving the geopolitical, geo-economic and social interests of great and emerging powers in the region, such security threat has incalculable repercussions – balance of power competition; (new) alliance formation; regime survival. The study investigates the wanton desire for nuclear possession among Asian states in the 21st century as means of balancing against both regional and global threats as well as strengthening regimes in power amidst the rise of terrorism. It argues that a complex security dilemma that involves neo-liberal domestic politics in the nuclear ambition of a state and realist regional and extra-regional powers with varying interests is responsible for the wanton spread of nuclear weapon in East and South Asia. It further raises some queries which have to be investigated and resolved in order to halt the complex security threat in these regions.

**Key words:** Nuclear proliferation, neoliberal, realist, balance of power, complex security dilemma

### **Introduction**

Since its introduction in 1945 by America at the ebb of WWII, nuclear weapon (NW) has not left the international scene of security debates. In spite of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which was meant to curtail the eminent danger of the further spread of nuclear weapons, the craving for it by political leaders has increased exponentially especially after the Cold War. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) makes it illegal, the possession or manufacturing of NW by signatory states. As noted by Wilcock (1997),

‘Whatever ulterior motives existed for putting in place a strict non-proliferation regime, the traditional reasons cited have emphasized the perceived unsuitability of many countries to possess weapons of such destruction and the dangers which could result if they were ever to make such an acquisition. The nature of nuclear weapons demands that these dangers are not simply ignored.’

The end of the Cold War which has led to a multi-polar system has also heralded a period of unprecedented desire for nuclear arsenals by many states.

Interestingly, the acquisition of NW itself resonates with both security dilemma and a belief of ‘fortified security’. Hence, this presents a vicious cycle where states are often compelled to keep proliferating NW to avoid being

overtaken by event. Of a major concern is the growing desire by many Asian states, particularly those in the Asia Pacific (for the purpose of this study: East and South Asia) for NW. These regions remained very important zones for political, ideological, economic and social battles between the two superpowers during the Cold War. The region being rife with many territorial disputes, states often clash with each other, thus, warranting much military capability and new defence systems, a situation that has fuelled nuclear weapon proliferation in the region, especially after the Cold War. The region's history of incessant invasions by both regional and exotic powers also accounts for this phenomenon. North Korea, for instance, continues to threaten to assimilate the South, attack Japan; India and Pakistan have clashed several times over a disputed border; China and the South China Sea saga<sup>1</sup>, Vietnam-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore, Indonesia all have issues to settle with one state or the other. This situation presents a natural tendency to take on 'the full armour' to face your neighbour who could be your next enemy, hence the wanton resort to NP. 'Does this bring peace?' 'Or does it have the potential of wreaking havoc than doing good?' 'Could it be a bane instead of a boon?'

This natural tendency 'has spurred a debate between proliferation 'pessimists' and proliferation 'optimists' (Wilcock, 1997; Alagappa, 2008). Realists (proliferation 'optimists') argue that nuclear proliferation (NP) has revived the concept of old-style limited war, occasioned 'natural' deterrence against the use of conventional force and led to a situation where the balance of terror has supplanted the traditional security dilemma. However, neoliberals (proliferation 'pessimists') contend that political and economic modernisation and interdependence are equally responsible for peace. Neoliberals assert that NWs reinforce states' propensity to fight each other; may result in accidents and terror sponsorship. Thus, as asserted by Alagappa (2008), the two opposing sides have set the parameters for the argument over the strategic effect of the global NP in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Either argument seems plausible in the nuclear arms race taking place in the South and East Asia.<sup>2</sup> Scholars and experts have in recent times identified two trends in the South Asian nuclear armament: nuclear modernization and the possible engagement of non-state actors in the nuclear proliferation race in the two regions (Joshi, 2007). Joshi (2007) therefore contends that, the Asian region is witnessing a substantial demand for nuclear technology, "both through horizontal proliferation from aspiring nuclear states such as Iran," North Korea, Pakistan, India, 'terrorist networks' and smuggling networks such as the A.Q. Khan network<sup>3</sup>, "seeking to augment their capabilities." Today, North Korean nuclear programme is far more complex (Bolton, 2012), a situation that has compelled the U.S. to consider plans of releasing its USS Zumwalt, a multi-mission stealth ship, to the Korean peninsula. The testing of the SM-3 Block IIA missile by the United States and Japan; commissioning of China's fifth Type 052D Luyang III-class destroyer into the North Sea Fleet in January 22, 2017; the flying of Chinese H-6 bombers over the waterways of the Korea Strait and the East Sea on January 09, 2017 as well as the increased North Korean nuclear threat are likely to spur other states in the region such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan to embark on nuclear armament for the sake of their own security.

Again, it is opined that pre-emptive nuclear attack has also contributed to the NP tension in these regions. Interestingly, the most pivotal concern is whether or not second-strike stability will always be counter-effective

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<sup>1</sup> For more, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/jul/12/south-china-sea-dispute-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-hague-court-ruling>

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical debate is discussed in detail in subsequent sections

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1506&context=jss>

enough or even be launched in the first place and if so, then how efficacious is the theory of deterrence? Clearly, a complex security dilemma seems to be at play in these Asian subcontinents. External powers like the US and Russia are both deeply involved in this security dilemma as they are both particularly concerned about their geopolitical and geo-economic interest and global and regional politics of balance of power. A rising great power China (though, arguably), and regional hegemon rival, India may also interpret these security and balance of power actions of the external forces as unwanted intrusions and attempt to keep balancing power in the region and to some extent the larger globe. It is not surprising that China vehemently opposes the dispatch of the US THAAD to the Korean peninsula.

### **The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the Asia-Pacific (East and South Asia)**

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which was opened for signatory in 1968 and became fully operational in 1970 is considered the keystone of the global nuclear non-proliferation system. It is believed that “more countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms control and disarmament agreement,” (UNRCPD, 2014), an indication of the relevance of the treaty and the seriousness with which leaders of the world attach to the need to have a nuclear free or at least, a very restrained nuclear armament world. The fundamental bargain at the core of the NPT is one grounded on ‘reciprocity’ between the parties involved – that is, in appreciation for the commitment by non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) refusal to obtain nuclear weapons, the nuclear weapon states (NWS) have devoted themselves to succouring the former in enjoying fully ‘nonviolent benefits’ of the nuclear age (Smith, 1987). The NWS are also required to not only restrain, but to ultimately end, their vertical proliferation (Ibid.)

There is no doubt that states in Asia and the Pacific have shown much more concern regarding the global efforts to successfully execute the NPT. For instance, Australia and Japan have spearheaded the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI)<sup>4</sup> since 2010 (Ibid.). In spite of the support the treaty enjoys in the region, there are a number of stumbling blocks that threaten the full realization of its goals. For example, India, Pakistan and North Korea are currently not signatories to the treaty. Interestingly, all these three are in East and South Asia. This poses greater challenge to the nuclear disarmament and the negotiation of a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia since Obama took office in 2008. The complexity is also fuelled by the desire for nuclear energy as an alternative low-carbon emission energy source in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, as contended by Griffith (2011: 2), the states in the Asia Pacific region not “only have vastly different nuclear capabilities but also operate within varied regional security environments.” Griffith further quips that:

Combined with recent US-Russian nuclear arms reductions, continued uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of ballistic missile defences (BMD), and the continued proliferation activities of North Korea, the region is arguably entering a new era in which there remain significant incentives for further vertical and horizontal nuclear proliferation. (Ibid.)

Again, while the NWS focus attention on curtailing horizontal proliferation through the NPT, the NNWS regard as urgent, introduction of disarmament measures relevant for nuclear weapons containment (Ibid.). As asserted by Harrison (2006), this friction coupled with the heightened tensions between the US-Soviet amidst the arms race that

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<sup>4</sup> See more at ([www.dfat.gov.au/security/npdi](http://www.dfat.gov.au/security/npdi))

characterized the Cold War, the purpose of the NPT seemed defeated. The NNWS's expectation has been that based on the non-proliferation articles, nuclear disarmament would eventually triumph over "the special rights of the nuclear weapons states," demising it at "some point in the future" (Rathbun, 2006: 233). The manoeuvres of the great powers, especially Russia and the US are also suspicious. The US which seems to be in the fore front in the fight against NP often put premium on its regional security and economic interests, hence relegating issues concerning non-proliferation (Joseph, 2005).

Another interesting development is the call for the US and Russia by China to severe their arsenals to Chinese levels, a demand deemed by Griffith (2011) as impossible. The US-India nuclear cooperation agreement of March 2005 as well as its subsequent drills with Pakistan after 9/11 has been condemned by rivalry states in the South and East Asia. The US-India nuclear cooperation is regarded to connote a lack of support for the standards governing the universal non-proliferation regime and thus, approving states deemed 'good' proliferators on strategic or normative grounds (Potter, 2005). Other states in the two regions have also expressed their displeasure toward the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for the exemption it granted India in 2008. China on its part, moved to obstruct a proposal that called on the five universally recognised NWS to halt production of high enriched plutonium and uranium awaiting the finalisation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) (Potter et al., 2010). Hibbs (2010) therefore contends that the precedence set by the US-India nuclear agreement is making it thorny for the superpower to convince NSG members to desist from engaging in deals with other states not party to the NPT, citing "China's prospective nuclear deal with Pakistan" as an example. In effect, these deals only have the potential of opening the flagship for nuclear proliferation in the regions. The United States' excuse on its deal with India as being more political than legal obligation has also being 'viewed by many as suggesting that states can pick and choose to implement whatever elements of NPT RevCon decisions they care to while disavowing others that no longer strike their fancy—an approach that makes it very difficult to hold states to their NPT obligations' (Potter et al, 2010: 15). This, thus clearly indicate that the NPT is simply 'a dog in the manger'; or as Thucydides' Melian Dialogue quips, "they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get".<sup>5</sup> In effect, volatile security subcontinents such as East and South Asia have no incentive to curtail their NP programmes in the face a toothless NPT system.

### **The realist-neoliberal nuclear proliferation debate**

Nuclear proliferation has been on the rise since the end of the Cold War. There are two opposition schools of thought advanced for its acceptance or discontinuity. The optimists, mainly realists argue that nuclear proliferation has the potential of halting or discouraging wars. They contend that NP will eventually lead to 'war deterrence', thus, when many states have it, they are unlikely to go to war since going to war would only result in mutual destruction. The Cold War seems to be a powerful reference point for such argument, as though, the two most powerful states then – the USSR and the US, both had nuclear possession but failed to engage in a nuclear war or even any large scale war, except perhaps the proxy wars mainly among their allies. Neo-realists have for instance expressed the presence of strategic stability in nuclear South Asia. To them, in spite of the intermittent regular low level conflicts between

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hobbes' translation.

India and Pakistan, the very presence of nuclear weapon in their backyards has made any major wars disincentive, and in effect led to strategic stability in the region. The realist argument has also found strength particularly the 1999 Kargil War<sup>6</sup> and the Cuban Missile crisis<sup>7</sup> in 1962. Though, both incidents reached 'brinkmanship' the powers involved refrained from employing military force. It has been widely acquiesced to be because of the existence of nuclear weapon that those matters were swiftly dealt with to avert a full blown war. To the realist, NP has made disincentive the propensity to go to war with another state, stressing that in the anarchic world, nuclear weapon would be indispensable for survival. Their call for second-strike capability, according to Waltz, would eventually lead to stability and peace in conflict prone areas. Thus, the proliferation of nuclear weapon would serve as a strategic deterrence which would reduce bilateral conflicts. Acquisition of nuclear armaments by Pakistan and South Korea will deter Indian and North Korean military intervention respectively.

The pessimists, mainly neoliberals have argued that NP rather emboldens states and open the floodgate for wanton desires for war. They further contend that unpredictable situations such as accidents, pre-emptive actions, theft and terror sponsorship could have disastrous repercussions in the face of an NP regime. Such argument has also found strong grounds on the basis of the Cuban missile crisis, the Norwegian rocket accident (1962, 1983) (and the Syrian chemical attacks). Akin to these bases is the assertion that trade and global interdependency predominantly ensure peace – thus, the world is experiencing some form of peace and less large scale wars because of increased global interdependency and not NP. Neo-liberal institutionalists argue that certain domestic factors of a state are likely to play an important 'role in determining its attitude towards nuclear weapons and non-proliferation, reducing the dichotomy that neo-realists and classical realists draw between domestic and international politics' (Ogilvie-White, 1996: 49). They further assert that most states, particularly the 'core states' would prefer international cooperation based on shared values and norms than arms racing (Chafetz, 1993). Those states classified as 'peripheral states' are more likely to perceive each other as a military threat and thus seek to develop nuclear weapons to respond to such threats (ibid). However, these states are also less incentivised to develop NP because they are rather motivated to join the core states, in order to enjoy the benefits of international economic and political cooperation (ibid). Ultimately, both states may regard each other as partners in a 'pluralistic security and complex interdependent community' where security is a shared and common responsibility but not primed on self-help.

Kenneth Waltz in 1981, in his monograph, 'The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better' argues from the realist perspective that a state may change in behaviour as a response to any external constraints caused by changes in relative power capability (Wohlforth, 2010: 24). Thus, the external variations become the stimuli for nuclear weapon armament. Realist therefore regard nuclear weapon proliferation as a means of warding off external threats and thereby boosting the security of the state. They emphasize self-security as the major concern of states in this erratic world. According to Steve Weber, the wanton spread of nuclear weapon leads to nuclear deterrence – constituting a certain genre of system change in itself (1990). Realism (especially, classical realism) basically views nuclear proliferation as the rational response of states attempting to safeguard 'their interests, since security represents the ultimate challenge to a state's survival' (Ogilvie-White, 1996: 2).

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<sup>6</sup> See (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kargil-99.htm>) for details

<sup>7</sup> See (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Cuban-missile-crisis>) for details

So, the realist believe that nuclear weapon would create stability and enhance peace, though not alleviate war completely. The liberals, however, expect global interdependency and shared values to lead to stability and peace. Interestingly, both arguments have not adequately elucidate the continuous proliferation of NW. In spite of possessing NWs, states continue to face insecurity; nuclear power states have boxed several wars, yet, none of which has culminated in the use of nuclear missiles; not even the complex global interdependency has ultimately brought a war-free society and discouraged nuclear armament. While NWs may stimulate strategic stability, they are likely to concurrently allow for more risk-taking in lower intensity rows. The activities of terrorists, rogue states as well as accidents cannot be guaranteed. Though, these two regions are socially, culturally and economically interlocked, their fragile political environment and distrust seem to put security concerns above everything else – and this keeps the security dilemma afoot.

### **Asia pacific, security dilemma and nuclear proliferation**

Asia pacific is known to be the most NP prone in the world with countries such as the U.S., Russia, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran all deemed to possess NWs. South and East Asia, however, seem to have plunged into this temptation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to a number of reasons including but not limited to what is best described as “security dilemma” in international relations. Scholars have argued that NP in South and East Asia is in part a consequence of the security dilemma that is so rife in those regions. A security dilemma is a situation that arises when a state's mechanisms for boosting its security apparatus adversely impact the security and peril perceptions of other states (Glaser, 1997), hence, compelling those threatened to take similar actions. The South Asian nuclear security complex, for instance, involves numerous security dilemmas, including states such as Pakistan vs. India, India vs. China, and Russia vs. United States<sup>8</sup> (Rauf, 1998). Another security dilemma dyad is presented by the tension between or the influence of the United States and China, as well as China's military presence in the South China Sea. In East Asia, elements of security dilemma exist in the relations between South Korea/North Korea, North Korea/Japan, Japan/South Korea/China Taiwan/China; the U.S./China, U.S./North Korea (see Table 1).

One thing of interest is that in most cases what one state considers a threat for which reason it advances its NP or military capabilities is not even in reality the case. For example, ordinarily, India steps up its nuclear and missile development programme in response to China's increased threat in the region, thus, to deter Beijing. Interestingly, Pakistan also finds New Delhi's nuclear and missile programmes as a threat and likewise increases its own security apparatus as a security deterrence. Beijing, on the other hand, embarks on nuclear armament to counter the threat posed by the United States' role in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, China's prime threat perception does not emanate from India's military capability or NW armament; however, India may deem it so and act accordingly, likewise other states such as Japan, Pakistan, South Korea and North Korea. Even though, Beijing seems to be more concerned with beefing up its nuclear and missile programmes, developing long-range ballistic missiles, both land-based and

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<sup>8</sup> Russia and the U.S. considered part of the Asia-pacific region but not necessary South Asian states. They are however involved in the geopolitical security dilemmas that exist in the entire Asian continent, especially the Middle East and South and East Asia.

submarine-launched (Sevastopulo, 2007), its cardinal goal is to present a formidable power balance against the influence of the U.S. in the two regions – what has been termed the ‘U.S.-Asia Pivot’<sup>9</sup> by many analyst and scholars. A more complex and intriguing aspect of the security dilemma in the two regions in the Asia-pacific, especially the Eastern region is the insatiable penchant of North Korea for nuclear and missile power glory in the region. North Korea’s new nuclear programme is regarded by many scholars in security studies and international relations as a response to U.S. authority and alliance with South Korea, but its very strategic position in a region intertwined with so many security issues cast doubt on its true intentions and has led to a rather more murky security atmosphere in the Asia-pacific, particularly East and South Asia. Japan and South Korea for instance, are increasingly confronted with grave ‘security challenges that range from worldwide proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through North Korea’s nuclear and long-range missile programmes and possible instability on the Korean Peninsula to rising tension with China in the East (/South) China Sea (Twomey, 2015:2-4). The Chinese perceive the recent United States security arrangement with the two East Asian countries as a means to ostensibly deter Beijing and Moscow but not North Korea as it purported to be the case (Shim, 2017). This will ultimately fuel China’s quest for more advanced capabilities such as thermonuclear weapon as well as second strike capabilities through long-range ballistic missiles, such as submarine launched ballistic missile capabilities.

However, such development would be interpreted by India as a potential huge imbalance in the region and thus, motivates it to further yearn for advanced capabilities development. Obviously, such a move by India will also impact on the Indo-Pakistani friction, as the issue of Islamabad may also come into the equation. The security dilemma in these two subcontinents in the Asia pacific can best be described as a chain of reaction that involves regional and extra-regional powers with contending interests. Thus, as Holmes (2007) argues, the countries in the Asian pacific especially India, China, Pakistan, Iran, deem it equally important to give prime focus to their national goals and interest amidst the goals of nuclear non-proliferation (particularly in the face of potential WMD-related terrorism) (Ibid.).

Some East Asia security experts such as Seongwhun Cheon, a senior research fellow with the Korea Institute for National Unification have called for a U.S. nuclear presence in the region. Seongwhun Cheon, has contended that a petite U.S. arsenal in South Korea would go a long way to

‘Provide a trump card that would enable a breakthrough in the North Korean nuclear problem. Most of all, it would become a game changer in the geopolitical and strategic dynamics surrounding the nuclear crisis. This would be similar to the “dual-track strategy” used by the administration of US President Ronald Reagan in Western Europe in the early 1980s’ (cited in Bolton, 2012).

Casting doubt on Cheon’s argument, Bolton asserts that North Korea’s nuclear programme is not only intended to react to the U.S., but principally for pride and nationalism (Bolton, 2012). Bolton further adduces his claim to Peter Hayes and Scott Bruce’s finding that:

‘[Even though], North is capable of operationally using nuclear weapons... its options for a nuclear strike are severely constrained... the only credible use of the DPRK’s nuclear arsenal is to detonate a bomb within North Korea itself to slow down or to stop an invasion in the context of an all-out war.’ (Hayes and Bruce, 2011).

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<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/the-response-of-chinas-neighbors-to-the-u-s-pivot-to-asia/>

However, a huge doubt can be cast on this considering the progress made so far in North Korea's missile development programme. Since 2016, Pyongyang has conducted over 20 ballistic missile tests<sup>10</sup> with some of them showing potential of long range capability; a number of those missiles have shown signs of being able to reach throughout the Korean Peninsula and its vicinity. Some of the very recent ones have also been directed toward Japanese waters. What this simply means is that it fuels the apprehension and suspicion of other states in the regions close by and motivates the zest for self-defence nuclear armament.

With this complexity of security dilemma in the East and South Asian subcontinents, NP in Asia particularly these regions threatens to overturn the existing global non-proliferation regime and to induce the tendency toward first-strike strategies among states in the pacific region. In as much as missile defences may help to decrease the risks of war especially when combined with defensive military stratagems, as the potential of pre-emptive actions is so high, missile defences in these regions can be recipes for crisis, instability and war. It is therefore imperative to critically analyse the trend and extent of the NP in the aforementioned regions and find a way out. As asserted by Joshi (2007), "These developments reflect, partly or in whole, the need for the weaker protagonist to correct the perceived security imbalance against the stronger threat." The two regions seem to suffer greatly from intention threat dichotomy which shows how an action produces a reaction from an untargeted state.

Table 1 shows a complex security dilemma and/or intention threat dichotomy that exist in East and South Asia. The development of NW by China is to deal with the US. But the threat from China's NW development is felt by India, though unintended. India, therefore, reacts to this threat by developing its own nuclear arsenals to deter or ward off the threat. In the same vein, India's nuclear power intended for China poses a threat to Pakistan, which then responds by advancing a nuclear capability. North Korea's NW may be intended to deter the US and any international body likely to pose a threat to the regime in power. However, such a security development ostensibly poses a great threat to not only South Korea but also Japan, thus compelling the two states to have strong itch to own NWs. This is evidenced by the acceptance of and the aid given to the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)<sup>11</sup> by both states.

Another twist to the complexity of the security dilemma here is the historical intention threat and alliance threat felt by many of the states involved. Even though, China's nuclear power is ostensibly to match up to the US and to some extent Russia's, Japan in particular is sceptical and senses a 'historical intention threat' where China in its quest to be a global power and to avoid a replay of its 'humiliation period'<sup>12</sup> has developed imbalanced NW and military capability in the region. With North Korea, a rogue and arguably nuclear power state as China's ally, is the Korean peninsula safe? Is the South China Sea enclave really free and safe for international navigation? Japan will therefore aspire to balance the nuclear equation either by developing its own or relying on that of allies.

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<sup>10</sup> See: <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-fires-missile-east-china-sea-south-korea-n742731>

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/03/07/518977830/u-s-sends-first-parts-of-thaad-missile-defense-system-to-south-korea>

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>

Moreover, misinterpretation of the intention has always been a major factor for the wanton spread of NW. The security dilemma in the South and East Asia subcontinents runs as a chain of reaction that comprises regional and extra-regional powers with competing political and economic interests. Both Russia and the US are deeply involved in these regions with varying political, social and economic interest.<sup>13</sup> European, South American and African states are embedded in these regions to a large extent. Even though, alliance formation is one major factor that can often lessen the threat dichotomy and conflict, Asian countries often times find themselves in a dilemma – socialist, communist, democrats, Westerners or simply Asians? Thus, it becomes difficult in showing true commitment in alliance, with a number of them maintaining double and conflicting alliances. This therefore, makes it murky to completely depend on a particular ally for total assistance in case of a major nuclear conflict - a reason to look for an alternative, or perhaps to develop your own (NW) capabilities.

### **Conclusion**

South and East Asia seem to show so much relic of the Cold War security dilemma. A complex security dilemma that involves neo-liberal domestic politics in the nuclear ambition of a state (Rosecrance and Stein, 1993, cited in Anon, 2017) and realist regional and extra-regional powers with varying interests.

As noted by Wheeler and Booth (1992: 31), the interpretation of the intention and capabilities of the other nation is a major factor that determines the birthing of a security dilemma. Whenever, an action of a state is wrongly interpreted there is bound to be a miscalculated response which will ultimately have serious security ramifications. Misinterpreting China's nuclear assertiveness as offensive instead of defensive by India may lead to a security apprehension. Misinterpreting India's reaction to China's nuclear actions by Pakistan as a herald of aggression in South Asia would induce severe security repercussions. Intriguingly, deciding on how to respond to the threat also put the state in a dilemma again. In effect, both the actions and the reactions put states in security dilemma, thus, perpetuating the cycle.

Kydd (2005) has argued that trust and mistrust are the central issues fuelling security dilemma in the balance of power. It is not uncommon for a friendly nation to be hostile or do that which can be injurious to the hitherto friendly nation. This junks the notion of extended deterrence and catalyses states' wanton zest for nuclear weapon proliferation. Malaysia and North Korea are still on rows over the VX nerve agent saga;<sup>14</sup> China and South Korea have still not got over the misunderstanding surrounding the deployment of the US THAAD. North Korea is even suspicious of China's reaction to its nuclear programmes and vice versa. Put succinctly by Acharya & Ramsay (2012: 5), the world is an environment with structural inconceivableness of offence-defence balance which will adversely impact bilateral cooperation. The rife of this uncertainty raises mutual suspicion and fear among the states in East and South Asia and eventually leads to reciprocal actions and reactions.

These regions seem to be plagued with the fear syndrome. Fear which actually births security dilemma is a pivotal factor that runs through every nuclear weapon state's nuclear drive.

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<sup>13</sup> See: <http://apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/RussiaAmSec/Russia-America-Security.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> For details, see: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/02/24/malaysia-says-vx-nerve-agent-used-in-killing-north-korean-leaders-half-brother.html>

Countries in these regions have sought to take their destiny into their own hands to prepare for any eventualities given their history of political and social volatility and the uncertainties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global politics.

It suffices to say that East and South Asian nuclear weapon proliferation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is particularly due to: (1) a complex security dilemma wrought in fear and uncertainty; (2) historical lessons/threats/pre-emptive actions; (5) Changing global politics and uncertainties (/unreliable allies); (6) regime survival and (7) the growth of powerful external non-state actors (terrorists/militants).

Until North Korean nuclear programme is checked, great power intrusions in these regions are strategically detached from issues of geopolitics and geo-economics, border disputes are properly addressed and domestic politics is streamlined, nuclear power proliferation in these regions is even likely to get dirtier.

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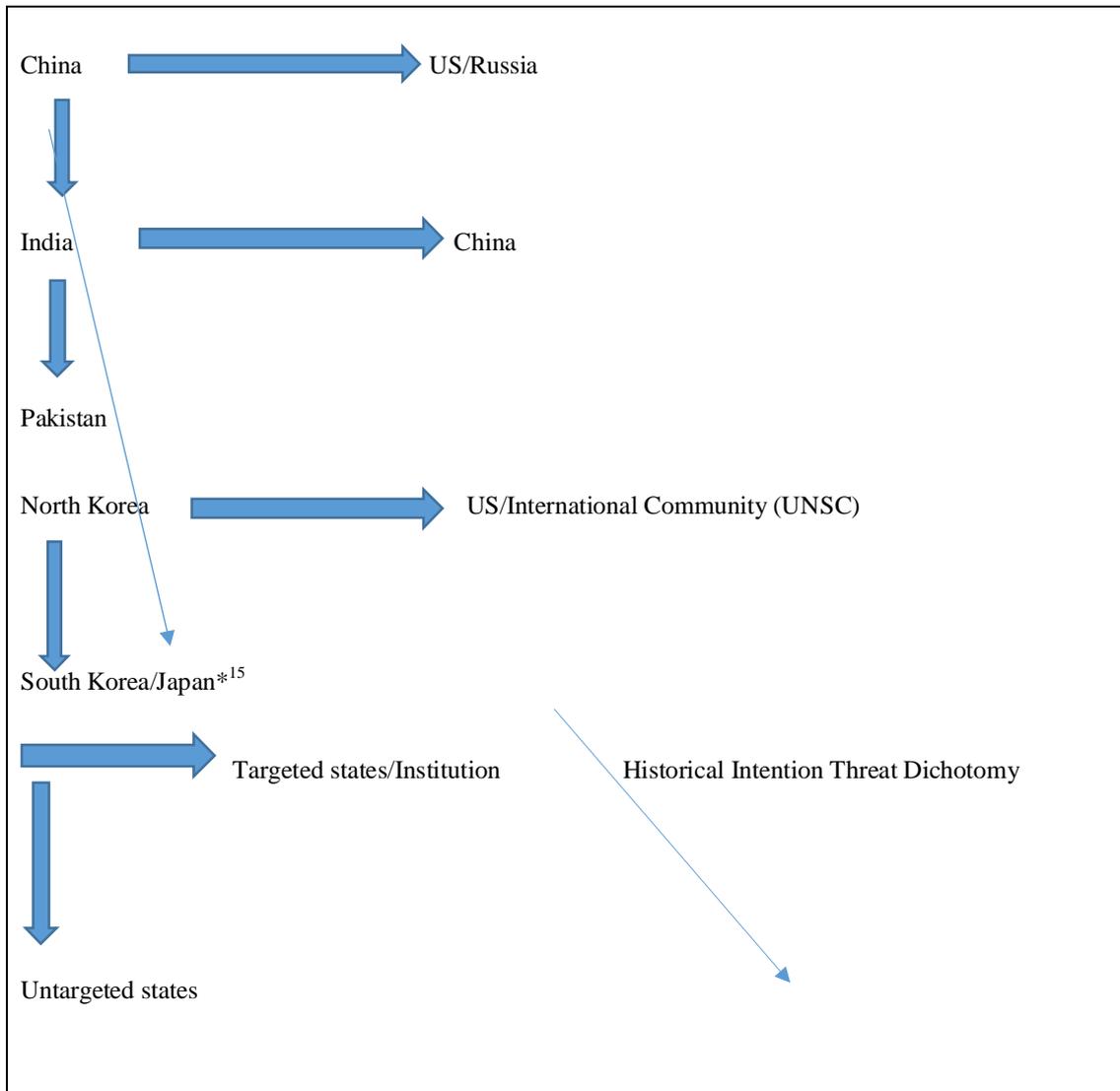
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**Table 1: A complex security dilemma (in South and East Asia)**

<sup>15</sup> South Korea and Japan, though not currently considered nuclear power states, have the motivation and urge to seek nuclear assistance to ward off nuclear aggression from North Korea and to some extent its (North Korea's) ally, China.