

5-2-1997

Paradox: A Vital Issue of Security Policy

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "Paradox: A Vital Issue of Security Policy," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 5 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol2/iss5/2>

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Title: Paradox: A Vital Issue of Security Policy

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Volume: 2

Issue: 5

Date: 1997-05-02

Keywords: Paradox, Social Cognition

Abstract. This article identifies several contradictory assumptions about human behavior which underlie policymakers attempts to make peace or keep it.

Some things just seem to go together. Sugar and spice and everything nice. Salt and pepper. Birds of a feather. But sometimes sugar and spice ruin the meal. Salt and pepper may, respectively, raise blood pressure and induce sneezing. Birds of a feather are faced with the Commons problem--too little resources for too many in the flock--leading to some birds being defeathered.

And so, too, with security policy. To reinforce international peace, we promulgate weapons reductions--the more the better. To reinforce domestic peace, we promulgate penalties for misbehavior--the more the better. But these policies may not be associated with things getting better but with things getting worse. And they may be based on contradictory assumptions about human behavior.

Weapons Reductions and International Peace. Many peace advocates support arms limitations, then arms reductions, then arms abolishment as the way to go. Perhaps, using logic similar to many gun-control enthusiasts, these peace advocates posit a positive correlation between lowered aggressive behavior and the lowered numbers of weapons. Yet many strategists of power believe that nuclear deterrence can be credited with limiting the intensity of international military and political aggression between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War. And--they note--nuclear deterrence was based on not an absence of weapons but a plethora of them. Of course, there are still a plethora of nuclear weapons and the frequency of political and military aggression has drastically increased since the end of the Cold War. So, was the decrease in conflict during the Cold War due to nuclear deterrence at all or to the containing influence of a largely bipolar world with two superpowers? Or to something else? Or one of many combinations of factors? Or to some factor or factors which themselves changed through time between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War. And then to counter the pro-deterrence assumption, one might promulgate the very substantial correlational research from social psychology that in many situations the very presence of weapons increases the probability of aggressive behavior. So where does that leave the policy developer?

Increasing Penalties and Domestic Peace. Many politicians and law enforcement officials support increasing penalties as the best way to maintain the peace. Potential perpetrators may then think twice, three times, or as many times as it takes, and realize that they can do the crime but not the time. So, they won't do the crime. Yet a vast body of experiments supporting theories on the psychology of learning clearly demonstrate how unpredictable the consequences of punishment are. They can include even the exacerbation in intensity and frequency of the behavior which is intended to be extinguished. As but one example, there are so-called sex criminals who--perhaps in spite of themselves--are more likely to engage in crime when punishment or the threat of punishment is increased. And what does this say to the adherents of strategic weapons abolishment in the international arena? To the adherents of weapon increases or maintenance in the service of deterrence?

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Finally, psychological theories of paradox illustrate how communicating the opposite of one's intent may increase the probability of engendering one's intent. Now if one only knew what intent is most adaptive to have. (See de Juan, J.M. (1987.) Arrows theorem under fuzzy rationality. Behavioral Science, 32(4), 267-273; Helprin, M. (April 10, 1997.) Nuclear force stability and counter intuition. Intellectual Capital.com; Van de Vijver, G. (1995.) The relation between causality and explanation in emergentist naturalistic theories of cognition. Behavioral Processes, 35(1-3), 287-297.) (Keywords: Paradox, Social Cognition.)