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Trends. The Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Fungibility of Money and Motivations

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Some citizens may protest paying all or some of their taxes because they do not want to fund morally disagreeable activities. Formal representatives of governments often punish these citizens regardless of the latters’ upstanding moral vision. Yet, even if government representatives were able to channel the money of these taxpayers into supporting morally agreeable activities without an added cost from the necessarily complex logistics, would the concrete, "on the ground" results be any different?

No. The fungibility of money—that one unit may be exchanged or substituted for another unit or equal part to discharge an obligation—ensures that less funds from one source can easily be made up with more funds from another area.

The fungibility of money also affects the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Some political entities concerned with combinations of the moral, ethical, legal, and political disagreeableness of proliferation may refuse to authorize and allocate money for activities that either constitute the acquisition or development of weapons of mass destruction or contribute to the welfare of an entity supporting or engaging in proliferation.

Are the concrete, "on the ground" results any different? No. Unless the funds of the withholders are somehow qualitatively unique—beyond quantitative notions regarding the exchange of strong or weak currencies—the fungibility of money in an international finance environment contributes to the most upstanding moral, ethical, legal, and political intent not leading to a congruent consequence.

Deterring proliferation is, then, irreparably harmed even without accounting for enabling governmental and business entities that intentionally seek to transfer technology, materiel, and personnel to covetous constructors of doom. As with the oldest and second oldest professions—prostitution and espionage—that of proliferating weapons of mass destruction can only be managed for better or worse, not expunged.

Perhaps the real fungibility issue involves that of human motivations that necessarily underlie proscribed and illicit behavior. For weapons of mass destruction, these motivations may include the most basic of needs for security. To destroy or threaten to destroy to ward off destruction or its threat. As paranoid-like or primitively aggressive as these needs may sound, don't they also undergird the behavior of political entities already possessing weapons of destruction, entities refusing to forswear their use or give them up, entities that are often the most vociferous in seeking to punish others who seek to join the club? Through the fungibility of human motivations, we are all proliferators. (See Gordon, M.R. (June 23, 1998). Despite bomb tests, Russia is selling 2 nuclear plants to India. The New York Times, p. A9; Ramirez, J.R. (1982). Echein: the built-in problem in the psychology of vehicle driving, arms possession, and nuclear capability. Journal of Evolutionary Psychology, 3, 86-102; Stiles, B.L., & Kaplan, H.B. (1996). Stigma, deviance, and negative social sanctions. Social Science Quarterly, 77, 685-696; Wessells, M.G. (1995). Social psychological determinants of nuclear proliferation: A dual process analysis. Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 1, 49-65.) (Keywords: Economics, Fungibility, Weapons of Mass Destruction, WMD.)