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Trends. Nonproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: India, Iran, and the Proliferation of Dysfunctional Maxims

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Two recent events underline a cognitive challenge for political authorities engaged in stemming the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. (1) Apparently, representatives of the United States (U.S.) Government have decided not to issue a visa to the chairman of India's Atomic Energy Commission who wished to attend a meeting of the American Crystallographic Association in Arlington, Virginia. (2) Apparently, representatives of the Iranian Government have successfully tested a medium-range ballistic missile capable of reaching an area including Israel, Saudi Arabia, most of Turkey, and a small part of Russia.

As to the former event, the rationale seems to entail a punishment for Indian nuclear detonations and striving to become a publicly declared nuclear weapons power. Yet does withholding the visa facilitate or impede the task of nonproliferation supporters staying abreast of Indian nuclear weapons developments? And does withholding the visa facilitate or impede Indian knowledge of science and technology that could facilitate Indian nuclear weapons developments? These two questions embrace a two by two matrix encompassing four potential maxims about the effects of visa withholding on proliferation.

As to the latter event, is the consequence to increase international pressure on Iran to cease from further ballistic missile developments? To increase international cooperation with and support for Iranian developments through kowtowing towards concurrent increases in Iranian political power? To increase international pressure on Iraq to comply with the weapons requirements of United Nations resolutions that were conceived at the end of Operation DESERT STORM? To decrease this pressure in the face of a legitimate military threat from Iran? These questions are founded on still other maxims about the consequences of medium-range ballistic tests on proliferation-related events.

In fact, there are three broad classes of maxims that drive aspects of nonproliferation policy--each without valid empirical reliability, validation, and qualification. (1) All political entities--if they possess the requisite ability and motivation--should possess nuclear weapons. The total proliferation of nuclear assets may ensure the nonproliferation of intent of nuclear weapons employment. In other words, if the balance of terror worked for the US and the Soviet Union, why wouldn't it work for all political entities? (2) Some political entities--through historical inevitability, prior fact, respectability, or responsibility--should be allowed to retain nuclear weapons, but not other political entities. This seems to be the de facto, most currently operative maxim, even if--according to many of the nuclear "have-nots"--laced with arrogance and hypocrisy. After all, one of the "haves" has already employed nuclear weapons on two occasions. (3) No political entities should possess nuclear weapons. Negotiations can effect a series of unilateral disarmaments or a staggered or concurrent multilateral disarmament.

Various decision-makers embrace one of the three maxims above, sometimes more than one concurrently or situationally on the basis, ultimately, of faith bordering on the religious. Does this mean that one should embrace instead a strategic-moral relativism? That all maxims are equally helpful and all

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should have prizes? No. A transcultural position on sanity suggests that different political phenomena--e.g., withholding a visa or testing a ballistic missile--will have specific consequences in specific situations. A guide to predictability may lie in identifying the narrative or drama within which leaders of a political entity place themselves--including their respective roles. For nonproliferation supporters to identify these narratives and develop and implement narrative changes, however, might require engaging in behaviors that are perceived as threatening to the self-perceptions and ideologies of these supporters. And for this reason, dysfunctional maxims continue to be reinforced and proliferate. (See Browne, M.W. (July 22, 1998). Scientists protest delay in U.S. visa for Indian nuclear physicist. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Ezzy, D. (1998). Theorizing narrative identity: Symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics. *Sociological Quarterly*, 39, 239-252; Jayaraman, K.S. (July 23, 1998). Indian atomic chief is refused US visa. *Nature*, <http://www.nature.com>; Polletta, F. (1998). "It was like a fever..." Narrative and identity in social protest. *Social Problems*, 45, 137-159; Ramsay, J.R. (1998). Postmodern cognitive therapy: Cognitions, narratives, and personal meaning-making. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 12, 39-55; Weiner, T. (July 23, 1998). Iran said to test missile able to hit Israel and Saudis. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Atomic Energy Commission, India, Iran, Nonproliferation, Nuclear Weapons, United States, Weapons of Mass Destruction, WMD.)