

2-4-2019

Psychologies of Going Nuclear

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), [Other Psychology Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor (2019) "Psychologies of Going Nuclear," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss2/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu, wolfe309@erau.edu.

Title: Psychologies of Going Nuclear

Author: Editor

Going nuclear can mean acting in an unrestrained manner. Or acting with wrath and rage, in fury. It can also refer to the threat or actual deployment or employment of nuclear weapons. What about the psychology of the latter in the context of United States (U.S.) planning to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (I.N.F.) which was originally signed on December 8, 1987 by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the former Soviet Union, President Mikhail Gorbachev.

The psychology quickly becomes psychologies as to why one might want to withdraw from the I.N.F. One might interpret through analysis of pre-signature deliberations that one or both parties never intended to comply with the treaty. Instead, signing the treaty immediately helped resolve several political problems roiling U.S.-Soviet Union and U.S.-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. Binding military constraints would then be but epiphenomena to be complied with or not based on other factors. Just one political problem would have been managing the short decisionmaking time to reactively attack upon identification of the U.S. launching of Europe-based missiles with nuclear warheads. From this, other psychologies follow.

One general consensus is that the now Russian Federation militarily violated the treaty first with deploying tactical nuclear weapons to influence U.S. and NATO decisionmakers during the 2014 Russian Federation intervention in Ukraine. This consensus has been denied by the Russians and countered with claims of alleged U.S. violations—e.g., the latter deploying missile defense interceptors presumed easily reconvertible into offensive weapons.

As opposed to claims about specific behaviors, some psychologies are contextual. One is U.S. concern with a more militarily formidable People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) in the Western Pacific, and how the treaty constrains the U.S. from responding through the deployment of missiles proscribed by the I.N. F.—even as the P.R.C. is not a party to the treaty. Another is the Russian Federation's concern with the developments in drone technology—unanticipated at the time of the treaty signing—facilitating U.S. attack potentials and decreasing Russian deterrence of nuclear attack. As well, there are moralistic psychologies necessitating treaty divorce upon alleged transgression much as the splitting up of married parties—without concern for the resulting consequences, militarily or politically. And then the various playings to various domestic and external constituencies as to who is stronger, weaker, aggrieved, sanctimonious, and so on; as to what other goals and objectives may be facilitated or impeded.

All the above psychologies are based on at least half-hearted attempts at logic, reason, analyticity, and calculation. But if one gives credence to some psychodynamicists and psychiatric existentialists, there other narratives and scripts, perhaps less appealing and more dubious, perhaps frightening in their robust and operative salience which may

have significant impact in joining and withdrawing from treaties. These narratives and scripts may be at least as unconscious as conscious, and among two sides qualify as a folie à deux. These psychological knots haven't been described by the late psychiatrist, Ronald D. Laing. Three short examples follow, the third, close to the oral rage and aggression described by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein.

Jill: I'm upset you are upset

Jack: I'm not upset

Jill: I'm upset that you're not upset that I'm upset that you're upset.

Jack: I'm upset that you're upset that I'm not upset that you're upset that I'm upset, when I'm not.

Jill: You put me in the wrong

Jack: I am not putting you in the wrong

Jill: You put me in the wrong for thinking you put me in the wrong.

She is devoured, by him being devoured by
her devouring desire to be devoured
He is devoured by her being devoured
by him not devouring her

With these knotty psychologies and regardless of the most esoteric of game theories, is nuclear Armageddon far behind? Here's Laing's potential answer:

If I don't know I don't know, I think I know

If I don't know I know, I think I don't know

References. Allison, G., & Zelikow, P. (1999). *Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis*. (2nd Ed.). Pearson; Klein, M. (1928). Early stages of Oedipus conflict. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 9, 169-180; Kramer, A., & Specia, M. (February 2, 2019). The risks to Russia, China, and Europe as the U.S. Scraps a nuclear deal. *The New York Times*, A9; Laing, R. D. (1970). *Knots*. Penguin; Matute, H; Blanco, F.; Yarritu, I., Diaz-Lago, M.; Vadillo, M. A.; Barbeira, I. (July 2, 2015). Illusions of causality: how they bias our everyday thinking and how they could be reduced. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4488611/>; Payne, K. B., & Gray, C. S. (1996). *Deterrence in the second nuclear age*. University of Kentucky Press; Sanger, D. E., & Broad, D. J. (February 2, 2019). U.S. plans to end nuclear accord signed by Russia. *The New York Times*, A1, A9.

Keywords: Conflict. Deterrence. Nuclear. Political. Psychology. Treaties. Unconscious.

Abstract/Description: This article identifies multiple psychologies affecting joining and withdrawing from nuclear weapons agreements.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

To comment on this article, please go online to
<https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss2/1>