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# **The “Double Standard” of Nonproliferation: Regime Type and the U.S. Response to Nuclear Weapons Program**

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## **Abstract**

There is no doubt that the NPT regime is far from being equal for all states involved. As the predominant hegemonic power since WWII, the United States plays a major role in deciding the fates of non-great power proliferators. This article tries to find the logical explanation of the phenomenon whereby some nuclear proliferators are absolved regardless of their active accumulation of nuclear arsenals while others are labeled as “rogue states” and ordered to disarm. The article suggests that a particular proliferator’s political regime could affect the way in which its state is approached by the U.S., known for its loyalty to democratic values. To check this argument’s feasibility, the author analyzes and compares types of political regimes of proliferators—which refer to non-great powers that commenced their nuclear programs since 1964. The study also shows that alignment with the U.S. and presence or absence of hostility toward the West are also influential factors. Along with the proliferator’s political regime, these factors determine whether the country is necessarily absolved, required to disarm, or heavily punished. The author finds that the U.S. tends to free democratic proliferators from charges, especially those aligned with the U.S., officially or unofficially. In most cases, the autocratic governments are coerced to give up their proliferation ambitions, though an alignment with the U.S. may work as an extenuating circumstance to render the punishment less harmful. The article aims to demonstrate that the U.S.’s tendency to coerce undemocratic *de facto* nuclear powers, while avoiding coercion against democratic partners, is not a mere “double standard” or bias, but rather, a part of the U.S.’s strategic policy.

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Background of the Study and Primary Hypothesis**

In most cases, the United States has played an active role as the world’s “nonproliferation policeman” in trying to persuade proliferators to give up their nuclear weaponry programs and become members of the NPT. At the same time, the approaches taken by the U.S. toward each group of proliferating nations

differ, often on a case-by-case basis, which results in the U.S. government being accused of applying double standards [1]. It is well-established that, while India, Pakistan, and Israel—the U.S.’s democratic allies in the Global War on Terrorism—have been exempted from international pressure regardless of their nuclear ambitions [2], the autocratic and anti-American-oriented Iran, Iraq, and Libya were seriously sanctioned and internationally isolated for decades. The U.S.’s allies in East Asia—Republic of Korea (South Korea, or ROK) and Republic of China (Taiwan, or ROC)—also faced a series of coercive approaches soon after disclosure of their nuclear programs in the 1970s-1980s. Despite the coercive measures against ROK and ROC not being as destructive as those related to Iran and Libya (and mainly consisting of contemplating the breaking down of bilateral cooperation in the military and economic spheres), the U.S. was strongly opposed to proliferation of the two Asian allies that, at that time, shared autocratic values [3]. Based on the evidences mentioned above, could the U.S. decision-makers have a bias toward non-democratic countries? This paper attempts to ascertain the legitimacy of the “double standard” claim by analyzing the common trend in U.S. nonproliferation policies and the reasons why such policies evolved.

In fact, the U.S. government’s nonproliferation record is not restricted to enforcement-only measures, since some examples of nuclear reversal are achieved via the means of cooperation. For instance, the American policy of active economic and technical engagement with no significant diplomatic pressure succeeded with three post-Soviet countries—Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan—which went through rapid democratization soon after the USSR’s collapse [4]. Despite it taking four years of bargaining to get them to dismantle their nuclear programs, these three countries openly demonstrated their willingness to restrain their nuclear ambitions in exchange for the material reward without prior sanctions from the U.S. side.

Encouraged by having had nonproliferation success with post-Soviet states, the U.S. made commitments to engage the totalitarian Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea). However, the failure of the subsequent Agreed Framework once again demonstrated that due to the considerable lack of mutual trust between the U.S., a democratic superpower, and the DPRK, the epitome of contemporary dictatorship, the engagement within the democracy/autocracy dyad may fail to succeed [5]. The cause of such deep distrust may be conditioned by the absence of shared values that hinders the successful cooperation via such a democracy/non-democracy dichotomy, whereas democracies are more likely to reach agreement because of their similar values, existing international democratic institutions, and trade connections [6–8].

This article’s primary argument is that the specifics of a proliferating nation’s political regime<sup>1</sup> may truly predetermine whether a nuclear proliferating nation would be coerced, engaged, or absolved. This argument does not suggest a mere bias against undemocratic countries, but rather, points to differences between them and the American type of political system and values that may negatively affect the

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<sup>1</sup> When talking about political regime, I refer to democracy, autocracy, and anocracy. The most widely accepted definition of democracy was given by Abraham Lincoln, who stated that democracy is “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Modern political science further specifies this vision, defining the key elements of states organized under democratic principles, such as fundamental freedom and rights; elections; rule of law; separation of powers on legislative, executive and judiciary bases; democratic pluralism, opposition; strength of public opinion; and freedom of media [10]. By contrast, an autocracy, or dictatorship, is a government that does not allege to these principles and generally suppresses manifestations of freedom. Anocracy usually refers to the middle state between democracy and autocracy, or a government that is undergoing democratization or autocratic rollback. Despite having some prototypes of democratic institutions, anocracies and newly created democracies are believed to be characterized by a high level of instability caused by civil wars and elite logrolling; hence, there are many differences between them and experienced democracies [11].

cooperation in the democracy/non-democracy dichotomy and eventually evoke mutual distrust. Hence, the idea behind the U.S.'s coercing nuclear autocracies is based on the assumption that cooperation with the autocratic governments may fail as result of autocratic leaders' cheating and their attempts to secretly preserve their nuclear potential. Similarly, this article does not ignore other important factors, such as a nation's political and military alignment with the U.S., the presence of any common enemies that could unite democracy and autocracy aiming to achieve the common goal, and the autocracy's presence or absence of prior hostile sentiments toward the U.S. While some believe that these three aspects contradict one another, William Dixon suggests that they are not mutually exclusive and proved their direct linkage to the democratic status of disputing parties [12].

As such, both democratic status and alignment with the U.S. might have caused America's tolerance toward the proliferating efforts of India, Pakistan, and Israel, whereas the severe castigation of Iraq, Iran, and Libya may be resultant of the autocratic political regime doubled on strong anti-American sentiments as major pillars of their national politics. The U.S.'s different reaction toward these two groups of proliferators can be considered reasonable in light of the high democratic standards and U.S. alignment status of the former, and severe autocratic rule and anti-American sentiments of the latter. Nevertheless, it is still unclear whether the alignment status of proliferating nations is a lesser component than its political regime, or vice versa. Considering the U.S.'s strong decision to dismantle the nuclear programs of the aligned Taiwan and South Korea at any cost, it may appear that for the U.S., the proliferating nations' democratic status matters more than alignment ties. This point will be elaborated on in the "Analysis" part.

## **B. Theoretical Limitations**

While WMD proliferation of the non-democratic, non-aligned, and openly hostile Iraq became one of the causes of America waging the Gulf War, the U.S. government never applied similar measures toward the autocratic and hostile People's Republic of China (PRC) and Soviet Union to halt their respective nuclear ambitions. Therefore, when discussing the proliferation of great powers [13]<sup>2</sup>, the logic of shared values retreats to the rational deterrence theory of Waltz [15, 16], which elaborates on the fear of mutual destruction [13]. Thus, the research scope is limited to the non-great powers only as the major field of my hypothesis's application.

## **C. Methodology and Case Selection**

In this paper, I try to analyze whether the disarmament policies exercised by the U.S. are actually predefined by the specifics of proliferating nations' political regimes and types of values. As mentioned above in the "Theoretical Limitations" section, the proliferation efforts applied toward the proliferating great powers are omitted. This research also excludes the cases of South Africa and Yugoslavia, whose nuclear programs had been voluntarily dismantled due to domestic issues and, thus, not as result of outside pressure or engagement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Accordingly, the great powers after the Cold War are Britain, China, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States" (p. 59). However, as to power transition theory, the U.S. may be distinguished as the dominant global power, or hegemon, until its legitimacy is challenged by one of the other leading powers [14].

<sup>3</sup> The disinvestment campaign against South Africa focused on apartheid and thus cannot be viewed as a part of nonproliferation diplomacy.

The non-great power proliferators are here divided into four groups according to the diplomatic approach that the U.S. government applied to them:

1. Not subjected to considerable international pressure despite proliferating: **India, Pakistan, and Israel.**
2. Engaged by the U.S. to dismantle their nuclear programs: **Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 1990s.**
3. Nations that experienced coercion and were eventually rewarded with positive security incentives after dismantling their nuclear programs: **Republic of Korea and Taiwan in 1970s-1980s.**
4. “Rogue” states that underwent heavy coercive measures aimed at destroying their nuclear programs: **Libya, Iraq, Iran in 1990s-2010s and North Korea in 2000s-2010s.**

To prove that the proliferating states’ political regimes and value systems play a crucial role in determining the steps which a democratic hegemon (the U.S.) applies toward them, it is vital to outline and compare the regime type of each state mentioned above. As such, I am referring to the Polity IV Project’s scales of democracy and autocracy and present my findings in *Table 1 (Appendix)*, which includes additional characteristics such as alignment/nonalignment status and the presence/absence of prior hostile sentiment toward the U.S. It is important to note that the analyzed proliferators’ political regimes refer to the nuclear “reversal” period of each state.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, each of the nuclear rollback cases will be researched in a different time paradigm.

#### **D. Review of the Existing Literature**

The question of whether democracies are more trustworthy with respect to nuclear weapons and cooperation is generally a subject of much discussion. To some extent, it relates to Immanuel Kant’s democratic peace proposition, which has both opponents and proponents in modern scientific circles. These days, many scholars believe that despite the much-debated notion that liberal democracies have a more peaceful disposition overall, democratic dyads tend to resolve conflicts peacefully, and thus the possibility of conflict in a group of two or more democratic states is minimized [17]. This view is backed by the notion that democratic leaders tend to be more selective about waging war and demonstrate more sensitivity to the cost of warfare, which creates a relationship between regime type and behavior of state [18–20]. There are also opposing ideas to the modern dyadic version of democratic peace. According to Oren, American social scientists intentionally emphasize the features that the American political systems share with the friendly democracies as most important, while downplaying similar traits between the U.S. and its autocratic foes. Oren concludes that the democratic peaceful behavior is a built-in bias [21, 22].

When it comes to nuclear weapons and their connection to regime type, debates become fiercer. Glenn Chafetz views the modern world as composed of the “core” and “periphery,” where the democratic “core” consists of liberal democracies with shared values. Per this hypothesis, the democratic-oriented “core” in the current system tames the security dilemma and makes nuclear proliferation unimportant for other democratic countries [23]. Another proponent of democratic peacefulness and rationality is Etel Soligen,

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<sup>4</sup> This relates to the period when the United States was trying to achieve the nuclear reversal of the abovementioned states by pressing them with sanctions or engaging economically. This period may be different for each proliferator; for example, the first part of the 1990s for Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the 1970s for the Republic of Korea, the 1980s-2003 for Libya, etc.

who claims that governments pursue liberal economic policies as opposed to radical autocratic leadership [24, 25].

However, positive views of democratic nuclear behavior have their proponents as well. George Perkovich states that a democratic government may be tempted by the large nationalist-oriented populations and start a nuclear program to boost its popularity and remain at power, as in the cases of India and Pakistan [26]. Sonali Singh and Christopher R. Way hold that democracies are even “significantly more likely to acquire nuclear weapons, although they appear less likely to pursue them seriously” [27]. Dong-joon Jo and Eric Gartzke emphasize that there is no special difference between the nuclear demeanor of democracies and autocracies, and thus there is no evidence that democratic nuclear powers are more prone to cooperation than undemocratic ones [28]. Sarah Weiner and Daria Azarjew disagree with the point mentioned above and state that “the new literature has ignored the statement that no democratic non-nuclear state has ever cheated on its commitments under NPT” [29].

Whereas there is no common opinion among scholars on how democracies and autocracies tend to act when it comes to proliferation decision-making, ordinary people tend to view nuclear autocracies as menacing. Alexander Georges mentions domestic political support and public opinion as one of eight key conditions that impact the success of a U.S.-coercive diplomacy strategy [30]. Michael Tomz and Jessica L. Weeks used Georges’s argument to check what types of nuclear states British and American adults perceive as threats that should be coerced. They found that the majority was less willing to use force against democracies than against autocracies. The greater number of respondents stated that nuclear democracies were less threatening than nuclear autocracies. Moreover, respondents were more likely to feel that attacking a democratic nuclear country would be immoral [31]. Therefore, Tomz and Weeks proved that most American and British citizens are prone to perceive “democratic bombs” as non-violent and believe that non-democratic proliferators pose a great danger toward national security. This tendency may be a clue as to why the U.S. withdraws any pressure from the aligned “democratic bomb-holders” and heavily castigates undemocratic ones.

## **II. The American Style of Foreign Policymaking**

Since the U.S. is the NPT’s most active promoter, the idiosyncrasies of American values and their implementation in international relations should not be ignored. Thus, part II is dedicated to the American style of foreign policymaking and the approaches that the U.S. applies to proliferators.

Nuclear nonproliferation is known to constitute a central pillar in American security policy nowadays. Per the U.S. National Security Strategy—a government security report released every four years—“no threat poses as grave a danger to our [American] security and well-being as the potential use of nuclear weapons” [32]. In 2006, then U.S. President George W. Bush, impressed by the first North Korean nuclear test, emphasized the need for “proactive nonproliferation efforts to defend against and defeat WMD and missile threats before they are unleashed” [2]. That Bush administration introduced stricter nuclear controls by supporting the Proliferation Security Initiative, aimed at blocking shipments of WMD worldwide and the United Nations (UN) Security Resolution 1540 designed for similar goals [2].

Yet, despite significant harshening of the nonproliferation policy toward rogue states, President Bush officially encouraged America’s cooperation with India in the nuclear field by establishing the India-

United States Civil Nuclear Agreement. Bush explained this step with reference to India's status as the world's largest democracy with a "strong nonproliferation record" [2]. With this agreement, the White House *de facto* recognized New Delhi's nuclear capabilities, despite India's NPT non-signatory status. George Perkovich defined Bush's nonproliferation policy as a "democratic bombs" strategy built on "bending nonproliferation rules for *friendly democracies* and refusing to negotiate directly with the *evil nondemocratic regimes*" [1]. While Perkovich and other scholars condemn American excessive selectiveness and underline that it caused double standards of American attitudes toward nonproliferation regimes [1], it is undeniable that democratic ideas construct the very nature of the U.S. as a nation, and thus cannot be eliminated from the U.S.'s specific way of approaching other countries. The U.S. claims to be "the oldest modern democracy" and regards the Constitution of the United States as the first-ever blueprint for a democratic constitution. As such, this behavior seems to unavoidably divide the world into "democratic friends" and "hostile dictators," even in dealing with bombs. For this reason, as soon as America's "identity as a nation is inseparable from its commitment to liberal and democratic values" [33], the U.S.'s excessive implication of selectiveness based on democratic standards in all spheres of international relations, including nuclear nonproliferation, is inevitable. Henry Kissinger explains the American style of foreign policymaking in this respect:

*"Secure between two great oceans, [the United States] rejected the concept of the balance of power, convinced that it was either able to stand apart from the quarrels of other nations or that it could bring about universal peace by insisting on the implementation of its own values of democracy and self-determination."* [34]

Former President Bill Clinton was also resolute regarding the idea that democratic political regimes bring peace among nations. Clinton's National Security Strategy is the best summary of his values:

*"...democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with the United States to meet security threats and promote free trade and sustainable development."* [35]

Therefore, the strong faith in democracy may be regarded as a hereditary distinction of American statecraft since the nation's emergence. This allegiance to democratic values caused temporary confrontations with American allies—including South Korea, Taiwan, and Pakistan—every time their governments shifted toward nondemocratic rule. In consideration of America's position as a unipolar leader since the Cold War, the international nonproliferation logic will unavoidably be determined by the rules when "bad guys, not bombs, are the problem" [1].

Despite the fact that the "bad guys" approach has been characterized by Perkovich as one that the U.S. cannot afford, the approach itself does not seem to be lacking in common sense. The logic of entrusting stable democratic allies with nuclear weapons lies within the specific features of democratic nations that construct a strong feeling of mutual trust in a democratic dyad. The first specific feature of democracies is unambiguous political accountability and transparency of statecraft. As Nicholas Zarimpas notes, "transparency does not appear in a vacuum but is a by-product of much broader issues such as democracy and cultural values" [36]. Therefore, the unique characteristics of democratic nations may be considered as contributing variables to establishing transparency and mutual trust among countries. First, due to transparency, it is more difficult for democracies to embark on different kinds of military aggression

preparations than it is for undemocratic governments [37]. Second, a special constitution of governmental apparatus in democratic states gives them a capability to signal their intentions clearly, and thereby provide precautions for adversaries to refrain from risky challenges [38]. Dictatorships, by contrast, have, in most cases, unclear political intentions due to the peculiarity of their government systems grounded solely on the leader's unilateral decision-making. For this reason, autocracies are believed to be more prone to violate the treaties and suddenly attack adversaries [39].

The second distinctive feature of democratic states is a bounded competition embodied in changing ruling parties through elections and other forms of legal procedures and practices [40]. This feature causes political actors to be heavily dependent on public opinion. Believing that rational citizens of democratic states are believed to be extremely cost-sensitive, democratic leaders have to regard nations' welfare as a priority, avoiding direct aggression with other states in order to preserve resources and infrastructure and, as well, to establish diplomatic institutions with the intention of resolving international tensions on preliminary stages. By contrast, autocratic states' unilateral governance has regarded regime survival as a major concern of dictators, who focus on active development of both offensive and defensive arsenals, including nuclear weapons, rather than necessarily caring for nations' welfare. Hence, autocratic leaders view their growing military capabilities, including nuclear arsenals, as a *carte blanche* to defend their illegitimate power from both outside enemies and inside rebels, as in the case of North Korea.

Furthermore, democracies are not predisposed to perceive countries with similar types of statecraft as hostile. Public debates and the decision-making process based on public opinion make democracies tend to promote peaceful conflict resolution both domestically and internationally. Because of this, democracies do not simply know that like-minded countries are peaceful, but they learn it over time via a constant practice of non-violent conflict settlement [38]. Meanwhile, unilateral, undemocratic governments do not tend to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution on either international or domestic levels. For this reason, there is a strong repulsion and mutual distrust in the democracy/autocracy dyad, which may negatively impact the cooperation between them.

Lastly, considering the various security threats that the U.S. is facing these days—including the activities of the Islamist insurgent groups, the rise of China's military and economic power, and Russia's incessant challenging of the American influence in the Middle East and Eastern Europe—it is urgent that the U.S. have strong allies that could support them in instances of scrutiny. The indigenous nuclear programs help allies to acquire military strength, and thus raise their voices in both metaphorical and practical ways. Likewise, from the U.S.'s point of view, only allies with flawless records can be granted such a privilege so that they will not become a troublesome or threatening asset for American national security in the future. As such, the democratic allies may be more reliable, since they are less likely to terminate or violate the alliances, while “non-democracies tend to treat democracies with less cooperative behavior” [41]. Hence, the nuclear armaments of the U.S.'s democratic allies contribute to the American influence in the respective regions of the allies' location, while representing no security threat to U.S. national security.

America's approach of letting trustworthy, amiable, and open-to-dialogue democratic nations proliferate while obstructing the proliferation of autocratic nations can be regarded as reasonable policy, as opposed to a mere double standard and bias toward undemocratic proliferating countries.



## A. Engagement vs. Coercion

The Iran nuclear deal is currently a key issue in the mass media, especially following President Trump's rejection to recertify it "based on a clear-eyed assessment of the Iranian dictatorship, its sponsorship of terrorism, and its continuing aggression in the Middle East" [42]. However, a few years ago, the deal was being celebrated internationally. Consensus was that it was made possible because of President Obama's engaging approach with the roguish Tehran. It is questionable, though, whether the 2015 agreement with Iran was necessarily a result of Obama's engagement more than Iran's surrendering to the prolonged coercive measures implied by the U.S. What follows is a brief look at the main distinctions between engagement and coercion.

While describing the U.S.-Russia-Ukraine trilateral talks concerning dismantlement of the nuclear arsenal, which was left on the Ukrainian territory after the Soviet Union dissolved, Steven Pifer observes that "the trilateral process succeeded because it found a non-zero-sum solution that met the minimum requirements of all three participants" [4]. Therefore, according to Pifer, the denuclearization of Ukraine was achieved via the sophisticated engaging diplomacy by the U.S. government. William Potter described this strategy as a "buy-up approach," which not only represented "a low-cost, high-return nonproliferation strategy," but reinforced cooperation of the post-Soviet nations with the U.S. as well [43]. Randall Schweller is among the scholars who elaborated on the engagement theory in 1990s and gave it a very accurate definition. According to Schweller, "in practice, engagement may be distinguished from other policies not so much by its goals, but by its means: it relies on the promise of rewards rather than the threat of punishment to influence the target's behavior" [44]. Consequently, engagement may refer to the method of changing the other actor's behavior through rewards.

Unlike engagement, coercive diplomacy is not a "win-win" scenario. Robert Art defines coercive diplomacy as "actions against another that do not cause physical harm but that require the latter to pay some type of significant price until it changes its behavior" [45]. Art calls this notion *compellence* and distinguishes it from *deterrence*, which is "the deployment of military power so as to be able to prevent an adversary from doing something that one does not want him to do and that he might otherwise be tempted to do by threatening him with unacceptable punishment if he does do it" [45]. Alexander George shares Art's view with respect to separating deterrence and compellence by claiming that, in contrast to deterrence, compellence aims to "reverse actions that are already occurring or have been undertaken by an adversary" without the use of an actual military force [46].

In practice, the example of Iraq demonstrates that in some cases, coercive diplomacy fails to achieve positive results, shifting to mere deterrence and the use of military power. George is among those who predicted the Iraqi scenario long before the Gulf War occurred. George stated that coercive diplomacy is "viable only under special conditions, and, moreover, is quite difficult to implement successfully" [30]. George asserts that the success of the coercive approach depends on the specific demand made by the rogue state, the desire of the coercing country to fulfill the demand, and (when the demand cannot be fulfilled) the resisting power of the rogue state toward coercive measures. Consequently, the success of coercive diplomacy depends on the right balance of negative ("sticks") and positive ("carrots") incentives. According to this perspective, the outstanding examples of coercive approach implemented toward South Korea and Taiwan in 1970s-1980s and Iran in recent times should be viewed as a result of coherence between punishment and bargain, whereas in Iraq's case, "sticks" prevailed over "carrots." Kurt Campbell

and Robert Einhorn echo George's vision and emphasize that a successful compellence implementation consists of "not just the threat of very harmful consequences if they persist but also a prospect of a much brighter future if they reverse course" [47].

### **III. Analysis: Nuclear Weapons and Who Can Be Entrusted with Them**

The data collected in *Table 1 (Appendix)* shows that the more that non-democratic trends constitute the government of a particular proliferator, the harsher the measures that the U.S. government is ready to apply against it. The table also demonstrates that the degree of severity of punishing autocratic proliferators can be "softened" depending on extenuating circumstances, such as lack of prior hostility and alignment, as in cases of Taiwan and South Korea.

From the table, we can see that not all "democratic bombs" were excused. For instance, Ukraine had already achieved a comparatively high degree of democratic development in 1991—measured as +6 points according to the Polity IV Project—yet still was demanded to dismantle the program in exchange for a reward. Moreover, it may still be unclear why the U.S. decided that the officially aligned ROK (Korea) and ROC (Taiwan) were less trustworthy with nuclear weapons than nonofficial allies, Israel and India. This part of the article is dedicated to uncovering the mitigating and aggravating factors that influence the U.S.'s way of approaching proliferators. These factors consist of alignment with the U.S. and the presence or absence of prior hostilely anti-Western sentiments.

#### **A. Regime Type and Nuclear Transparency**

As already mentioned, the U.S. has typically been resolute toward the notions of democratic values. However, this does not mean that America never establishes bilateral relations with non-democratic governments. When it comes to the U.S.'s strategic interest, the alignment with autocracies comes about, which explains why South Korea and Taiwan—dictatorships since their respective governments' establishment—managed to create an asymmetric patron-client alliance with a democratic global superpower. Hence, the U.S. seems to never say "never" to the undemocratic states which seek to create the bilateral alliance with the U.S. Still, the relations between democratic and autocratic governments are very likely to become complicated as time goes by, mainly due to lack of shared values.

Balancing the communist People's Republic of China turned out to be the U.S.'s major concern in the East Asian region during the Cold War era. As such, the U.S. government had officially recognized the Republic of China under the autocratic leadership of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) governed by Chiang Kai-shek. At that time, the relations between the U.S. and Taiwan had been certified by a separate Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty, signed in 1954. Taiwan entered the NPT in 1968. However, due to rapid military accumulations and growing nuclear capabilities on mainland China, the U.S. began to look for a peaceful resolution of the cross-strait conflict and eventually (in 1978) switched its recognition from Taipei to Beijing, while trying to preserve the relations with ROC by means of The Taiwan Relations Act [48]. For Taiwan, this action constituted "a deep betrayal" [49], so that Taipei, which had already been attempting to commence a secret nuclear program before 1978, set to work with increased zeal.

Relations between the South Korea and the U.S. began when the South Korean troops were put under the command of General MacArthur during the Korean War. The formal, bilaterally binding agreement, known as the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty, was signed in 1953. In Nixon's administration, South Korea was under the dictatorship of President Park Chung-hee—a former military general who came to power in 1963 and headed the country until his assassination in 1979. President Park perceived the possibility of abandonment by the U.S. in light of strengthening American isolationism and performing the inward-looking policies after the Vietnam War. According to multiple sources, the Nixon Doctrine appeared ominous for South Korea—heavily dependent on American military assistance—and thus became a primary reason for Park's pursuing nuclear ambitions [50, 51]. Such is why ROK considered its military forces to be inferior to North Korea's army at that time<sup>5</sup> and started seeking nuclear weapons [50]. On the other hand, Park was not trying to negotiate with the U.S. in order to revive the ROK-U.S. alliance. Since Carter's decision to withdraw the U.S. troops and nuclear warheads from South Korea was not supported by majority opinion and had been openly criticized even by government officials<sup>6</sup>, Park Chung-Hee unilaterally made a typically autocratic decision—despite the fact that he could have succeeded in strengthening the alliance via open dialogue with the White House—to conduct the secret nuclear program instead of improving relations with the ally. The nuclear behavior of Taiwan and South Korea in the 1970s echoes the statement about lack of transparency and unclear intentions of autocratic governments, as mentioned in the previous part.

The two countries' nuclear secrecy was disclosed almost simultaneously and became the major reason for the U.S.'s strong desire to dismantle their programs as quickly as possible. By the close of 1978, President Carter brought the nuclear programs of both South Korea and Taiwan under control and managed to significantly diminish the two nations' nuclear ambitions. The American reaction toward the secretly proliferating allies was moderate compared to the approaches applied later against Iran, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea, but was surprisingly harsh considering that India's nuclear test in May 1974 was not followed by “any kind of immediate punishment or concrete penalties” [54].

Despite the discrimination, this double standard approach can appear reasonable. First, the two East Asian nations began proliferation secretly and did not signal their intentions until disclosure. Meanwhile, India, which was not even aligned with the U.S. at that time, did not keep secret its proliferation intentions. When discussing the NPT with the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in April 1967, Indian official L.K. Jha noted that “there are two major obstacles to Indian acceptance [of the NPT]: one is the security problem vis-à-vis China; the other is the fact that India has developed nuclear technology which contributes to Indian confidence and prestige, but which appears threatened by serious curtailment if India adheres to NPT.” Hence, Indian representatives alerted the U.S. to their developments in the nuclear sphere seven years before the Smiling Buddha actually took place. Jha also added that, from India's perspective, the NPT was “a rough treaty—i.e. strongly discriminatory against the non-nuclear weapons states” [55]. India's disclosure of their proliferation ambitions by rejecting the NPT coincide with Schultz's considerations that democracies have a more transparent governmental system which helps them signal their intentions clearly [38]. Moreover, Indian officials made it clear that nukes were

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<sup>5</sup> By the 1970s, North Korea was “the sixth largest military force worldwide” [52].

<sup>6</sup> “. . . the South strongly desires the retention of a US nuclear presence in Korea. More clearly than Pyongyang, Seoul will read the total withdrawal of nuclear weapons as evidence of US intent to forego their use in a future conflict. In an obvious effort to head off complete nuclear withdrawal, the South Korean press has suggested that the Pak government would be justified in developing its own nuclear weapons if the US nuclear shield were withdrawn” [53].

necessary more to boost Indian confidence than to generate an attack. Thus, despite the fact that Indian proliferation was not desirable for the U.S., the fair behavior and straightforwardness of intentions made the White House perceive India as a predictable and non-threatening proliferator.

In contrast to India, the opacity and unpredictability of autocratic Taiwanese and South Korean proliferation concerned the United States. Peter Hayes and Chung-in Moon note that “Park’s toying with the nuclear option made him an unpredictable and even dangerous client who needed restraint in the eyes of US policymakers” [56]. Compared to Park’s dictatorship, Taiwanese autocracy seemed to be even more unpredictable, considering Taiwan’s having violated the NPT even before the U.S. applied the One-China policy. Consequently, unpredictability and lack of transparency in U.S.-aligned nondemocratic governments, on one side, and openness and nuclear transparency of proliferating democracies, on the other, may have been a reason for the nonproliferation double standard policy—where, in essence, “democratic bombs” are perceived as good, “nondemocratic bombs” as evil.

The argument that some democratic proliferators are absolved because of transparency may seem less convincing given Israel’s image as the most clandestine *de facto* nuclear state. It is true that Israel’s policy of *amimut* (from Hebrew: “ambiguity”) “is probably the nuclear democracies’ most extreme case of nondemocratic policymaking” [57]. But *amimut* would be impossible if the American government did not support it in its own way. This paper’s previous part emphasized that the U.S. government is heavily dependent on domestic public opinion. President Kennedy was conscious of his winning the presidential elections with overwhelming support by Americans of Jewish origin. Even more, American citizens strongly condemned the application of coercion toward Israel and called for the creation of a formal alliance with the Holy Land, so President Kennedy had to make excuses, stating, “We support the security of both Israel and her neighbors” [58]. It may thus be credible to say that the support of American citizens toward Israel became a stumbling block to force Israel to give up nukes. Whereas India is trusted with nuclear weapons because of its transparency, Israel seems to be too beloved by the American citizenry to be confronted with coercive policies. Moreover, while Israel’s nuclear ambitions may appear ambiguous for the international community, there is no evidence that Israel keeps the line of nuclear opacity when dealing with the U.S. in a tête-à-tête. Barack Obama’s heading off of Arab nations’ demand to expose Israel’s nuclear program by pointing out that “any efforts to single out Israel will make the prospects of convening [a regional nuclear weapon-free] zone conference unlikely” [59] suggests that the White House is quite aware of Israel’s intentions but wishes, for whatever reason, to keep them concealed to the rest of the world. Thus, when the U.S. faces a dilemma of who, among its allies, can be trusted with nuclear weapons, the democratic proliferators are more likely to take over the autocratic-aligned states that are perceived as too unpredictable to be trusted with the arsenal.

Some may conclude from my observations that transparency is thereby the major factor in determinations of which proliferators are absolved. A further specification should be made here, however. The autocratic and openly hostile North Korean government cannot be resolved simply, regardless of its so-called “transparency” expressed through open claims and demonstrative nuclear tests. The proliferation ambitions of India, Pakistan, and Israel are permitted because these countries constitute a triple combo of being democratic, pro-American-oriented, and aligned at the same time. Those failing to meet such requirements simultaneously are likely to be disarmed—just like Taiwan and South Korea, which were American-friendly and aligned with the U.S. but ruled by dictators in the 1970s, or like Ukraine, whose democratic transition turned out to also not be enough to let Kiev go nuclear.

It is also important to note that India, Pakistan, and Israel play a vital role in the U.S.'s geostrategic plans. Despite not being official allies, these three strategic U.S. partners' roles cannot be denied. As India has become a truly global player and growing regional power, its voice is of extreme importance when it comes to the Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea. Both India and Pakistan play an important role when it comes to the Afghanistan issue and fighting the terrorist groups in the regions. Given the strategic position of Israel—the only true American partner in the Middle East, considering Saudi Arabia's complicated political issues—the U.S. cannot apply coercion toward its security partner. Moreover, the view is that the U.S. is trying to boost the military power of its democratic security partners as a part of a larger strategy, so they might be able to promote American interests in times of scrutiny.

## **B. Democratic Transition and Its Flaws**

In December 1991, the Soviet Union, a great citadel of world socialism *de jure*, dissolved. For this reason, Washington and Moscow did not manage to proceed the START I ratification, whereas the nuclear “treasure” of the USSR was split among the new independent nations: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The Soviet fiasco propelled the democratic transition<sup>7</sup> among these nations and facilitated the creation of democratic governance on its initial stage. Regardless of past hostility during the Cold War period, in the early 1990s, perceptions of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan toward the U.S. were fairly positive, as they were looking forward to setting themselves apart from the Soviet past and making efforts to integrate into the international community. The U.S.'s attitude toward the newly created nuclear countries was very controversial. On one hand, the U.S. warmly welcomed the emergence of new democratic nations and perceived them as potential partners in both economic and security spheres. Unlike the case of autocratic proliferators, the U.S. did not perceive threats from them, because these countries already had proto-democratic institutions and values that strongly held them back from any kinds of aggressive actions.

However, the nuclear statuses of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan seemed risky for the following reasons. First, despite the fact that these three nations were absorbed in developing their democratic values, ongoing civil protests—typical for newly democratizing nations—were destabilizing domestic situations and even opened avenues for the possibility of a reversal toward autocratic regimes again.<sup>8</sup> As such, if the autocratic elites took over, Washington would risk witnessing the birth of three nuclear autocracies, not less dangerous than North Korea and Iran. Besides, we cannot write off the fact that just few years before the liberation, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan were part of America's greatest foe: the Soviet Union. Hence, prior military hostility toward the U.S. could partly contribute to the U.S. distrusting the post-Soviet states. Another important circumstance was America's preparedness to agree with the Russian Federation's claims of being the only legitimate descendant of the Soviet Union. U.S. officials may have believed that this step would propel the ratification of START I.

In light of these factors, American leadership decided that Soviet nuclear weapons would better remain under the “safe, responsible, and reliable control with a single unified [Russian] authority,” considering that Russia was becoming a new great power as the scion of the USSR [61]. Such a decision created strong security concerns, especially from the Ukrainian side, as result of Russia's constant claims over

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<sup>7</sup> Democratic transition refers to the process when countries undergo changes in a democratic direction.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, due to internal instability, Belarus and Kazakhstan eventually turned back to an inward authoritarian regime, whereas only Ukraine managed to preserve democratic order [60].

Crimea since 1993. Nevertheless, in times of economic destitution, security concerns yielded to concerns over the nation's welfare, so Kiev eventually agreed to dismantle its nuclear heritage. In a sense, Ukraine's decision embodied the proof of Ukraine's development in a democratic direction at that time. To get at least a formal sense of security protection, Ukraine required the U.S. to offer security assurances. Therefore, the Memorandum on Security Assurances, known as the Budapest Memorandum, was signed in 1994 in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

As to the material side of Ukraine's denuclearization, it was decided to exchange a nuclear arsenal based on trifold funding from The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, the Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, and the United States Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Fund (NDF). In practice, the voluntary dismantling of the nuclear program with assistance from the U.S. helped Ukraine to get rid of enormous costs connected with nuclear weapons maintenance and obtain roughly \$1 Billion in total from the American budget [62] plus Russia's writing off energy debt [63]. Ukraine's example proved that democratization of a former autocracy is not enough to generate entrustment with a nuclear arsenal; domestic systems inside the state must be quite mature to avoid confrontation with the U.S. and, even more, to derive some economic benefits from cooperation, for instance, in the nuclear nonproliferation field. Therefore, for the past twenty years, the Ukrainian nuclear disarmament case has been an exemplary case of nuclear nonproliferation.

In view of the 2014 Crimea annexation and the Donbass conflict, the first government of the independent Ukraine has been domestically criticized for failing to obtain adequate security mechanisms to prevent the military intervention and to obtain the advantages comparable to the economic value of the post-Soviet nuclear weaponry transferred to Russia as a result of 1995 deal [62]. Both of these failures could be a result of the clumsiness of 1990s Ukrainian decision-makers in the matters of foreign affairs and governance, when the former local communist party elite faced issues they never dealt with, such as high-level diplomacy. In Russia's case, its envoy mainly consisted of highly skilled and experienced Soviet diplomats, which granted Russian Federation a more beneficial position in negotiations. Also, the corruptness of some Ukrainian officials, who viewed nuclear arsenals as useless and were eager to exchange theirs for real cash as quickly as possible, could also contribute the Ukrainian side's posing minimal demands during the negotiations. As the common liability of a nation transferring from dictatorship to democracy, the inefficiency and corruptness of the first Ukrainian government should be the only thing to blame for failing to obtain adequate compensation and the necessary conditions for preserving national security after nuclear disarmament—e.g., NATO membership.

### **C. Why Did the Engagement with North Korea Fail?**

The Agreed Framework was initiated by the White House and actively supported by the aligned Republic of Korea. Signed in 1994 with the aim of eliminating the nuclear threat on the Korean peninsula, it remains the U.S.'s only experiment with engaging a rogue state, and it eventually failed to work effectively. Regardless of the anticipated possibility of failure, the U.S. government was probably hoping to implement the ambitious scenario of engaging the dictatorship under the influence of its ally, the Republic of Korea, whose government strongly emphasized the notion of "one Korean nation" in the 1990s and 2000s.

From the very beginning, this agreement was controversial, as many American politicians believed that its vague provisions created a window for violations from the North Korean side. Republican Senator John McCain emphasized that in dealing with authoritarian governments, the excessive use of “carrots” was doomed to fail. During his speech, McCain mentioned that “In the place of sanctions, we are forever negotiating with North Korea. In a way, the framework agreement is a renegotiated, bilateral Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. I submit that if history teaches us anything about modifying the behavior of totalitarian regimes, it is that the efficacy of incentives depends on the simultaneous employment of disincentives. To get a mule to move, you have to show it the carrot and hit it with a stick at the same time” [64]. McCain’s words turned out to be prophetic when, in 1998, North Korea suddenly launched the Taepo Dong-1 rocket even though the Agreed Framework was still in effect. The further dialogue only deepened mutual distrust and ended up with the U.S. accusing North Korea of violations and refusing to deliver the light water reactor to the DPRK.

Still and all, it is unclear why the U.S. tried to engage North Korea, considering previous experiences with dictatorships, which would suggest that the Agreed Framework was doomed to fail from the start. The successful outcome seemed *a priori* impossible considering the strong mutual distrust that resulted from the vast difference in values and the means of statecraft. By engaging North Korea, the U.S. missed a chance to halt Pyongyang’s nuclear program before it became legitimately threatening. Thus, the Agreed Framework once again proved that denuclearizing the rogue state is almost impossible without prior compellence.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This article argued that the proliferating nations’ political regimes, sentiments toward the West, and aligned/non-aligned affiliation with the United States defines nonproliferation policies toward them. The most important finding is that the U.S. seems to rarely apply considerable pressure toward democratic proliferators. The evidence shows that the U.S. government does not perceive threat from countries such as India, Pakistan, and Israel, which began their proliferation under the rule of respective democratic governments. Likewise, the proliferation of autocratic governments, even those allied with the U.S., cannot be tolerated because of their lack of nuclear transparency and the high predictability of nondemocratic regimes’ behavior. For this reason, all that is left for the U.S. is to take coercive measures against undemocratic proliferators with the intention of halting their nuclear programs. However, this does not mean that the U.S. perceives all autocratic regimes as hostile and applies similar measures toward them. There exist some extenuating circumstances, such as the alignment status with the U.S. and absence of prior hostility toward the West, that may change compellence from “a tough” to “a soft” version, as happened with South Korea and Taiwan. In any case, the U.S. seems unable to allow autocracies to possess nuclear weapons due to the autocracies’ unpredictability, opacity, and lack of trustworthiness. The cases of Taiwan and South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s proved that when deciding on nonproliferation measures for rogue states, the U.S. primarily considers the country’s political regime, while alignment and lack of hostility play only extenuating roles.

The examples of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan demonstrated that nuclear powers undergoing democratization also cannot be tolerated, considering their instability. Thus, despite possessing some proto-democratic institutions and values, the domestic instability and probability of the autocratic rollback turns the democratizing nations into unreliable clients to be trusted with deadly nuclear arsenals.

Nevertheless, the governments of countries undergoing democratic transition proved themselves to be mature enough to achieve a consensus with the U.S.

The article also explains the failure of the Agreed Framework with North Korea and foresees an enhancing of America's coercive measures, unless Pyongyang undergoes democratization. The mutual distrust, which was a stumbling block along America's engagement toward DPRK, has resulted from the great difference in values and domestic apparatus, leading to inauspicious relations between the nations and the eventual failure of the deal. Obviously, the U.S. will not engage North Korea in the near future and, instead, will be awaiting for Pyongyang's surrender. To achieve this effect, the U.S. will probably seek international support for sanctioning and isolating the rogue country with doubled force. However, in view of North Korea's non-participation in international and economic exchange, the sanctioning approach toward Pyongyang should be reconsidered in a way that could affect the North Korean government directly, so as to prevent them from the further proliferation.

Based on the facts mentioned above, the findings of this article are as follows:

First, the U.S.'s policy of avoiding coercion of democratic allies and security partners which possess nuclear weapons while coercing undemocratic nuclear powers should not be viewed as a mere "double standard" or bias, but an important policy based on the specifics of the political regimes in these two groups of countries. For instance, the transparent character of the nuclear democratic allies helps the U.S. easily predict their goals and gives assurance in the non-threatening nature of their nuclear programs from the U.S.'s point of view, while the nature of nuclear autocracies, in most cases, is neither transparent nor U.S.-friendly.

Second, exposed to the security threats from the Islamist insurgent groups, and facing both the rise of China and the challenging foreign policy of Russia, the U.S. needs strong military allies/partners that could stand on their behalf in the respective regions, while not being able to hurt the U.S. in return. As such, it may be legitimate to assume that strengthening the U.S.-friendly democratic partners with nuclear weapons could be a part of this strategy.

Third, U.S. citizens are not prone to view the democratic nuclear powers as threats, especially when it comes to the U.S.-friendly democratic nations. In the case of Israel's nuclear program, the U.S.'s decision-makers may be restrained to use coercion against Israel considering the pro-Israel public opinion shared by many Americans.



## V. Appendix

Table 1. Reaction of the US Government to Nuclear Programs

	India	Israel	Pakistan <sup>9</sup>	Belarus	Ukraine	Kazakh	ROK	ROC	Libya	Iraq	Iran	DPRK
Proliferation period	1960s – Today			1991 - 1995			1970s	1960s-1985	1980s-2003		1980s-today	1960s-today
Political regime trends <sup>10</sup>	+7→+9	+9→+10	-8→+8	+7	+6	-3	-8	-7	-7	-9	-5→+3	-10
Alignment (AI) / nonalignment (N) status with US	N→AI	AI	AI	N	N	N	AI		N	N	AI→N	N
Presence (P) / absence (Ab) of hostility towards US	P→Ab*	Ab	Ab	P→Ab **			Ab		P	P	Ab→P ***	P
Approach applied by US	“Soft version” sanctions →Tolerating			Engagement aiming denuclearization			“Soft version” compellence aiming denuclearization		“Tough version” compellence	Military invasion	“Tough version” compellence	Engagement → “Tough version” compellence
Nuclear reversal status	Continuous proliferation			Success			Success		Success		Success	Fail

\*Indo-American cooperation began since George W. Bush administration

\*\* Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* eliminated the Soviet-American hostility

\*\*\*The Iranian Revolution of 1979 which eliminated the pro-Western ruling house of Pahlavi dynasty called for the emergence of the Iranian-American mutual hostility

<sup>9</sup> Political regime of Pakistan has undergone the rapid shifts from democracy to autocracy and vice versa before the final consolidation of democracy a decade ago. When proliferating, Pakistan was in process of democratization [60].

<sup>10</sup> Here I referred to the scales provided by Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946-2013 which determines democratic regime with the scores ranging from +6 to +10, anocracy, or transition – with the scores from +5 to -5 points, which autocracy earns from -6 to -10 points.

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