



NUCLEAR DEBATES IN ASIA

THE ROLE OF GEOPOLITICS AND DOMESTIC PROCESSES

EDITED BY MIKE M. MOCHIZUKI AND DEEPA M. OLLAPALLY



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and Deepa M. Ollapally

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Nuclear Debates in Asia

*To our children—
Miles and Ella Mochizuki and
Kavitha and Siddharth Anandalingam*

Acknowledgments

In contrast to most multiauthor works, we can happily say that this book was done in record time with minimum fuss. This is not entirely our doing. We were lucky enough to recruit an extraordinarily conscientious and collegial group of authors. We also received generous funding from the MacArthur Foundation, making the book possible in the first place—a special thanks to Emma Belcher and John Fei for the confidence reposed in us.

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One of the highlights of writing this book was the “Nuclear Perspectives in Asia” workshop we jointly organized with Vietnam National University (VNU) in 2014 in Hanoi, bringing together scholars and top policymakers. It gave many of us from the United States a firsthand look at the perspectives of perhaps the important nuclear aspirant country in Asia right now. We want to thank VNU’s Rector Professor Nguyen Van Khanh for his interest and support, and single out our Vietnam-based contributor, Professor Nguyễn Thị Thanh Thủy, for making the workshop a reality. Our colleague Linda Yarr, who coauthored the chapter on Vietnam with Professor Thanh Thủy helped immensely in making the arrangements with VNU.

We organized the workshop at an opportune moment as the annual Nuclear Power Asia conference was being held in Hanoi in 2014 for the first time. Our group was able to attend this event that convened regulators, nuclear energy agencies, and regional and global operators. As a research team, it gave us a rare chance to hear viewpoints of individuals at the ground level of nuclear energy—and we might add, a forum for us to question and debate nuclear policies, plans, and propositions these experts expressed.

In addition to Scott Snyder who authored the South Korea chapter and Linda Yarr, our colleagues Marcus King, Janne Nolan, and Douglas Shaw joined us in participating in both the VNU workshop and the Nuclear Power Asia conference. Their presentations enriched the workshop and assisted the contributors of this volume in establishing the international context of domestic nuclear debates in the Asian countries examined here.

Each of us enjoyed great personal advantages, making it much easier to get the book done. Deepa’s husband Anand, daughter Kavi, and son Siddhu, kept letting her off the hook for familial duties and instead provided just the right amount of entertaining diversions. Despite her grueling first year in medical school, Kavi found time to send me a steady stream of engrossing literary books way off best-seller lists, giving a much-welcomed balance to nuclear reading. Siddhu provided an exceptionally agreeable work environment for me with his original and virtuosic music compositions and performances. For this and much more, Deepa dedicates this book to her children.

During the course of this project, Mike and his wife Clare had the opportunity to take their son Miles and daughter Ella to Hiroshima. The memorable day spent at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park reminded us that the international community must work harder to prevent another Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Chernobyl, or Fukushima. With the hope that the world can prevent future nuclear catastrophes, Mike also dedicates this book to his children.

Deepa Ollapally and Mike Mochizuki

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1

Introduction

Uncovering Nuclear Thinking in Asia

Deepa M. Ollapally

The rise in global demand for nuclear energy is heavily concentrated in emerging and aspiring Asian powers. While nuclear power may alleviate energy shortages and climate change concerns, the promotion of nuclear energy compounds Asia's nonproliferation problem with the spread of nuclear technology and safety risks. Moreover, Asia remains at risk for high stakes nuclear weapons competition, nuclear conflict, and nuclear terrorism. All this is exacerbated by rising geopolitical tensions in Asia, with more assertive policies in the region testing regional stability. Against this setting, our book questions the extent to which we can infer nuclear thinking simply from external conditions and considers the notion that policy thinking on nuclear power and proliferation in Asia is more complex and variegated than often posited.

Most analysts in the nuclear field have viewed state policies as inexorably driven by purposive unitary actors responding to external stimuli.¹ Nuclear weapons development is said to be based on interstate competition; and the pursuit of nuclear energy is often viewed as a pathway to gaining sensitive dual-use technology or energy security writ large. Not surprisingly then, nuclear trends in Asia are mostly taken for granted and seen to be determined by exogenous factors. More recent scholarship has questioned the assumption of traditional neorealist frameworks that see a state's nuclear choices as directly determined by external security forces, with little consideration given to domestic contexts. Scholars in this vein argue that even nuclear policy, uppermost on the "high politics" ladder, is often shaped by domestic factors ranging from political survival and bureaucratic compulsions, to social norms and identity politics. We share the skepticism that strategic circumstances are sufficient to explain the choices that states make on nuclear weapons and nuclear energy questions, and our framework argues for the necessity of a domestic lens of analysis.

Specifically, our book addresses a key question: How do we understand the trajectory of nuclear energy, nuclear security, and nuclear nonproliferation discourse and debate in seven key Asian countries (China, India, Japan, Pakistan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam) as well as countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)? We seek to understand how nuclear debates in Asia change over time and why they are changing the way they are. We explore what drives the debates and how decisions are framed, what the interplay is between domestic dynamics and geopolitical calculations in the discourse, where the center of gravity of debates lies in the countries, and what this means for regional cooperation or competition, and U.S. nuclear energy, nonproliferation, and deterrence policy in Asia. We propose that domestic debates are structured (not random) along what we term “Nationalist,” “Realist,” and “Globalist” foreign policy schools of thought (to be elaborated later in the chapter).²

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON NUCLEAR POLICY: THE INTERNATIONAL LENS

Dominant neorealist theory holds that nuclear policy is a byproduct of competition in the international system.³ Variations of realism such as defensive realism (which in particular strongly recognizes the idea of the “security dilemma”), in the end still do not fully see the need to go beyond those state preferences that can be more or less derived from the external environment. Charles Glaser describes his strategic choice theory as “integrating defensive realism with neoclassical realism,” wherein both the international environment and a state’s motives matter.⁴ Still, for Glaser, fundamental state interests are constant and his focus remains on the strategic interaction between states. He sparingly collapses state motivations into essentially two types: greedy and security seeking, leaving the door tantalizingly ajar for ascertaining motives from domestic political and identity urges.⁵

Muthiah Alagappa in his book *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia* concludes that “security interaction in Asia increasingly approximates behavior associated with defensive realism.”⁶ Alagappa is one of the first to conduct a comprehensive study of nuclear strategies of new and old nuclear states in post–Cold War era Asia, broadly defined, with his work squarely located in the neorealist framework. A major objective of Alagappa is to counter deterrence pessimists on Asia by arguing that unlike the “grim scenarios associated with nuclear weapons in Asia,” the preferences and behavior of new and aspiring entrants to the nuclear club are consistent with neorealist deterrence logic and indeed, “on net, they [nuclear weapons] have reinforced national security and regional stability in Asia.” Indeed, Alagappa suggests that arguments by nonproliferation adherents, especially in the West, opposing developing countries acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities because of higher perceived “risks” are not based on substantive grounds. He bluntly states, “Intellectual (and possibly racial) biases and national strategic interests are

often cloaked in this argument, which is usually advanced on behalf of the international community.”⁷

The type of bias that Alagappa alleges is entirely plausible. If bias of this sort exists, it ironically undercuts a foundational assumption of neorealism—that is, the likeness of states. Of course it is not possible to easily prove the existence of such biases.

On the other hand, what would be useful in disputing value judgments regarding issues such as nuclear risk-taking are more even-handed analyses of domestic thinking on nuclear questions across both developed and developing countries. Jacques Hyman’s work with his cross-regional case studies is instructive in this regard.⁸ This bias issue is beyond our scope here, but it is worth noting that our analysis of competing worldviews in Asian states can serve as a sort of internal check on such a bias in our own work by our consideration of what different in-country elites and opinion shapers are themselves saying. Of course this does not eliminate another potential bias—the unfortunate reality that national leaders across the globe tend to shroud their nuclear preferences with realist principles or “reasons of state,” disguising other motivations. As Leon Sigal has insightfully noted, “Realism seems to be the secular religion of the foreign policy establishment.”⁹ All those who work anywhere on foreign policy using official state sources are vulnerable to this evidentiary bias. It is practically an occupational hazard. However, if nothing else, it is clearly worth acknowledging it rather than the usual practice of simply ignoring it. In this connection, we would note that our attention to contending viewpoints goes some way to alleviate this particular bias.

Like Alagappa, the National Bureau of Asian Research’s (NBR) *Strategic Asia 2013–14: Asia in the Second Nuclear Age*, also ends up ascribing mostly realist security motivations to states. This is not surprising since the authors of the seven comprehensive country case studies in the book take a more or less state-centric view of nuclear weapons and strategy despite some attention to societal factors.¹⁰ The NBR volume is generally less optimistic than Alagappa on regional deterrence stability. The lead editor, Ashley Tellis, in particular cites what he views as the inevitable and dangerous growth of nuclear multipolarity in Asia. For Tellis, the link between a deteriorating security environment and affirmation of nuclear weapons is pretty direct: “Given the contested geopolitics of Asia which is defined by several enduring rivalries, many unresolved territorial disputes, significant local power transitions, and now the continent-wide anxiety provoked by the rise of China, it is not surprising that nuclear weapons have retained their critical importance.”¹¹ A major policy recommendation from the NBR study is for continuing American nuclear supremacy (if not nuclear hegemony) in Asia and shoring up America’s extended deterrence commitments to allies against China in no uncertain terms. What is not adequately elaborated is the domestic nationalist reaction that this policy might produce in China (as well as domestic dilemmas in allied countries it might even create regarding the right amount of “hugging” of the United States).

Meanwhile, more fine-tuned work homing in on the nuclear postures and strategies of six regional powers—China, India, Pakistan, France, Israel, and South

Africa—by Vipin Narang, shares to a significant extent Alagappa's deterrence optimism on China and India, but not so on Pakistan. Taking inspiration from neorealism but going beyond it (as he puts it), Narang aims to explain why and how a regional power might "optimize" its nuclear posture, taking into account both external security and internal political and financial constraints. At the domestic level, Narang identifies two critical variables that influence a state's choice of nuclear posture—civil-military relations and resource constraints.¹² His explanation of India's and China's stability-inducing "assured retaliation" nuclear posture and its future continuity rests significantly on the assertive civil-military setup in the two countries in which civilian leadership presumably keeps the more aggressive military in check. Conversely, Pakistan's alarming "asymmetric escalation" nuclear posture is premised to rest on its perceived dire security conditions and accentuated by the powerful hold of the military.

To anticipate—Pakistan, as described by Christopher Clary in this volume, emerges as an exception to the general Globalist/Realist nuclear outlooks of other states. Given Pakistan's special status, it merits greater scrutiny here. In Narang's book, Pakistan's nuclear posture is described as "the most aggressive option available to nuclear states and involves fielding both tactical and strategic capabilities that can be mobilized and launched quickly, often through pre-delegated authority in the event of conventional conflict."¹³ As Clary noted in the NBR volume, Pakistan "is increasingly reliant on its nuclear arsenal for deterrence, despite the fact that India's conventional force-advantages are not yet dire."¹⁴

The work by Narang and authors of the NBR volume tends to support the view of Pakistan as an exception to the rule of deterrence stability promoting behavior among Asian states (save North Korea), and it hints that security factors are underdetermining. Instead, the civil-military asymmetry in Pakistan takes on special significance to understand Pakistan's nuclear stance.¹⁵ For example, it turned out that Pakistan's surprise war against India in 1999, so soon after the two countries went nuclear and apparently included nuclear posturing by Pakistan, was a military enterprise locking out the civilian leadership who were engaged in peace talks with India. It was widely seen as an attempt to "internationalize" the Kashmir dispute by linking it with a nuclear flashpoint. Instead, the result was to reinforce international opposition to changing territorial status quo by any sort of force.¹⁶ Without the particular type of hyper-nuclear Nationalism including nuclear Islamism that Clary lays out in this volume, and that the military in Pakistan encourages and fans, we would be hard-pressed to understand how Islamabad's highly risky (and internationally roundly condemned) nuclear postures and actions are possible. Pakistan's most recent pursuit of battlefield nuclear weapons, its evolving nuclear war-fighting doctrine, and its willingness to buck international opinion and suffer the associated costs simply underline this point. Most ominously, what we see is how nuclear Nationalism in Pakistan is able to successfully rationalize even the most egregious behavior of proliferators like A. Q. Khan. As a final point here, it should be noted that China's checkered record on assisting Pakistan's nuclear and missile program casts a strong

shadow on China's otherwise deterrence-promoting practices that most authors see prevailing.¹⁷

To sum up and to put nuclear outlooks in a broader context: In a region where China's neighbors view its rise and assertiveness as a growing threat to their national security interests and energy sea lines of communication, we would expect a particularly high salience for external security factors. After all, at least since 2010, China has been widely seen as the source of spiking tensions from East Asia to South Asia: the standoff with Japan in the East China Sea; butting up against Vietnam and Philippines with increasing sovereignty claims and build-up in the South China Sea; and encroachment into the disputed border with India. Meanwhile, leaders of the two other major Asian countries—Shinzō Abe of Japan and Narendra Modi of India—have displayed a greater willingness to respond more forcefully.

Partly in anticipation and partly in response to this rise of China, many observers are evoking power-transition theory as the most applicable general international relations theory to contemporary Asia, and in particular China-U.S. relations in Asia. Given the high profile of power transition theory popularized, for example, as the “Thucydides Trap” by Graham Allison, and its antecedents in neorealism discussed above, it is worthwhile to specifically consider this theory's value to understanding nuclear debates in the region.¹⁸

Power transition theory harks back to A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler's status disequilibrium model, which pits an ascending, dissatisfied, revisionist state against a relatively declining, status quo power—in our case China's challenge to U.S. dominance in Asia.¹⁹ The most unstable and conflict-prone time frame is identified as when the declining hegemon is about to be overtaken by the ascending challenger. For structural realists like Aaron Friedberg and John Mearsheimer, rivalry between China and the United States (and Japan for that matter) is set to intensify as China grows richer and stronger.²⁰ For Friedberg and Mearsheimer, this type of competition will inevitably be settled through war (or “hegemonic war,” to use Robert Gilpin's term).²¹ Power transition theorists of recent vintage tend to see the challenger as initiating war.

The competing maritime and territorial claims in the region that impinge on a number of China's neighboring states and the growing intensity of these claims since 2011 at the same time that American capability and will are seen to be sapped by Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East, fuels this conflictual scenario. Thus the nuclear debates and outlooks of countries like Japan, India, and Vietnam—all which have ongoing territorial or maritime disputes with China, could be expected to reflect these geopolitical tensions and uncertainties. Taken to its logical conclusion, the so-called “second nuclear age” could even be viewed as wrapped up in these geopolitical anxieties.²² As Ashley Tellis states, “continuing interstate competition, along with the expectations of many states that nuclear weapons will enhance their security and offer deterrence value, ensures that regional arsenals will grow.”²³

The strong claims of inevitable conflict that power transition theory posits may be questioned. Like critics of neorealism, several scholars looking at power transition

theory have argued that shifting material capabilities are not enough to predict conflictual outcomes, and that the distribution of benefits from the prevailing system needs to be taken into account.²⁴ Others point out that lest we forget, it is state officials who make strategic choices and even “construct realities” that cannot be predetermined.²⁵ A power shift to Asian states is also seen by some as part of a more general diffusion of global power having to do with technological, economic, and institutional changes. Referring to such fragmentation of power and the Asia-Pacific region, Rosemary Foot explains, “That diffusion of power and the hybrid nature of world order complicates decision-making for all political actors and suggests that we need to investigate the full spectrum of concerns—domestic as well as external—that governments face when they determine their policies.”²⁶ In contemporary Asia, a critical question then becomes whether the dual or hybrid nature of economic interdependence and strategic rivalry is firmly tipped in favor of the former or not for China, power transition notwithstanding. The shifts in domestic viewpoints and orientations during this period of power transition thus deserve more attention than they get.

If we take the criticism of power transition theory seriously and extend it to nuclear policy, we can conclude that geopolitical competition—even under the more acute power transition version in Asia—need not inevitably result in the most extreme outcome of war or a ratcheting up of the nuclear arsenal as part of competitive strategic capabilities. This of course also has implications for how America should be thinking about its rebalancing strategy and deterrence strategy in Asia.

From a critical reading of power transition theory in Asia, we can infer for our own work that geopolitical calculations need not drive domestic debates about nuclear policy to the degree that we might expect (consistent with our reading of neorealism earlier). This is not to suggest that external conditions and geopolitical pressures do not matter for nuclear debates. We recognize that the international system sets up constraints and incentives for a country’s nuclear choices. In the nuclear choices made by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan for example, we are not downplaying the importance of alliance with the United States and extended deterrence. However, we concur with Etel Solingen’s point that to understand these countries’ “relative receptivity to persuasive and coercive aspects of the U.S. alliance requires us to delve into their domestic politics.”²⁷ What we are putting forward is the need to factor in interactive dynamics between external and internal contexts—more specifically, that nuclear policies are mediated by domestic debates. In other words, even nuclear issues are often a source of domestic contestation and policy alternatives between competing foreign policy worldviews, something that tends to be passed over by many nuclear analysts.

We now turn from the international security literature to the growing studies of nuclear issues that give weight to domestic factors and we situate our own work within it.