

Nuclear Deterrence in Iran–Zionist Entity Relations

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Abstract

The main aim of this research is to examine the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on international peace and security by focusing on the concept of nuclear deterrence and its underlying assumptions, and by typologizing the behavior of nuclear-armed states and analyzing their propensity for aggression or self-control. Accordingly, the main research question is: do nuclear weapons deter conflicts by making states feel more secure, or do they trigger more conflicts by enabling states to take greater risks in interstate disputes? In other words, what effect do nuclear weapons and their related capabilities have on the tendency of states possessing these weapons to seek war against their rivals? In response to this question, the hypothesis of this research is that nuclear weapons are not inherently instruments of aggression or conflict deterrents, but rather the meaning given to these weapons by leaders is what matters most. Therefore, in assessing the nature of the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons, one must simultaneously pay attention to two semantic factors: the risk-taking or "zero-risk" tolerance of decision-makers in the face of a crisis, as well as the importance of the credibility and reputation of the nuclear-weapon state. Thus, the deterrent power of nuclear weapons, whether through nuclear balance or nuclear superiority, is influenced by these two semantic factors. This research is qualitative and explanatory, and in the data analysis section, the case study method will be employed, focusing on how Zionist entity, as a nuclear state, deals with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Keywords: Iran, Zionist entity, deterrence, nuclear weapons, security dilemma.

Introduction

Theories related to "deterrence strategies" were developed during the nuclear age and in response to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Each of these theories aimed to provide security and prevent a major nuclear war, but the methods and means of achieving long-term stability in each of these theories were different from the other (Payne, 2018, p. 3). In general, deterrence can be divided into "conventional deterrence" and "nuclear deterrence" depending on the type of weapon used. The aim of deterrence or the condition for its success is to prevent war. Therefore, deterrence studies are opposed to war-related studies, which focus on methods of war management and victory. In this regard, the concept of "deterrence failure" means that deterrence leads to war (Park, 2023, p. 68).

Considering the objectives and theories of deterrence, the primary aim of this research is to examine the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on international peace and security by typologizing the behavior of nuclear-armed states and their propensity for aggression or restraint. Accordingly, the main research question is: Do nuclear weapons enhance deterrence capability and restrain the possessor state from aggression, or do they strengthen these states, turning them into risk-takers, thereby leading to insecurity and endangering international peace and security? In other words, what effect do nuclear weapons and their associated capabilities have on nuclear states and encourages them toward belligerence against their rivals?

The central hypothesis of this research is that nuclear weapons are inherently neither instruments of aggression nor deterrents to conflict; rather, the meaning that leaders assign to these weapons is what matters. In other words, when assessing the nature of the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on international peace and security, one must simultaneously consider two semantic factors: the "degree of risk propensity or risk aversion of decision-making leaders" in facing a crisis, and the importance of the "credibility, status, and reputation of the nuclear-armed state" in using or not using these weapons.

This study is a qualitative and explanatory research that examines the relationship between two main variables: international security as the dependent variable and the existence of nuclear weapons as the independent variable. Based on the research hypothesis, the role of mediating variables will be addressed in explaining the relationship between these two variables. In data

analysis, a case study method will be employed. Data collection will be conducted through a review of the existing literature on the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on international security, as well as an examination of theories related to nuclear deterrence.

After examining the conceptual framework of deterrence and its various types, as well as reviewing the existing literature on the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons, the research findings section will first typologize the behavior of nuclear-armed states based on three categories of nuclear deterrence theories. Subsequently, the analysis will proceed based on the factors emphasized in the study's hypothesis (the two semantic elements). Finally, to operationalize the hypothesis, the article will examine Zionist entity's deterrence strategies as a nuclear-armed state toward the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on the presented theories.

1. Conceptual Framework

Deterrence is a strategy aimed at altering an adversary's political preferences without resorting to direct conflict, thereby preserving the status quo and peace. Its core objective is to prevent war or any undesired action; consequently, the outbreak of war would mean a complete failure of deterrence (Wirtz, 2018, p. 59). Snyder (1983, p. 129) defined deterrence as the power to dissuade an adversary from taking an unwanted action by threatening unacceptable costs. Schelling (1966, p. 69) defines deterrence as a threat intended to keep an adversary from doing something and Harrington (2106, p. 93) defines it as the credibility of the threat to respond to a military attack with massive retaliation.

Deterrence comprises four crucial elements: the capability of the deterring state, rationality and cost-benefit calculation, the credibility of the threat, and the reputation and prestige of the deterring state. The core of deterrence is the capability to operationalize a threat. Credibility, in contrast, pertains to the perception within the adversary's mind about whether the deterrer's threat will be executed. In Paul's view, deterrence rests on two fundamental and indispensable elements: capability and credibility. Capability denotes the physical ability to act, whereas credibility signifies the resolve or willingness to act. Given that deterrence is fundamentally a psychological interplay between the deterring actor and the challenging actor, the significance of the latter element—credibility—is substantially greater (Paul, 2015, p. 26).

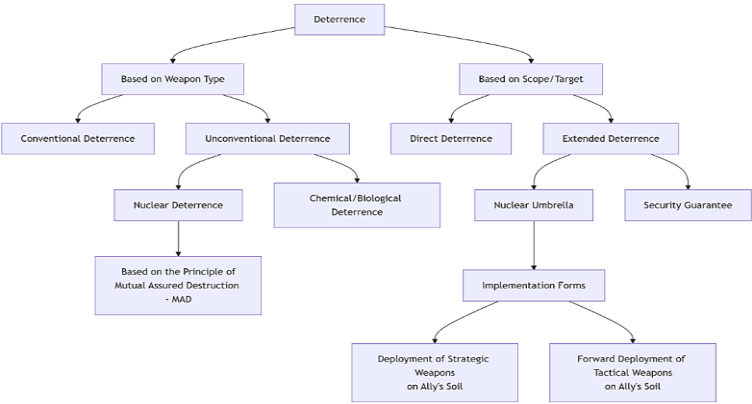
In deterrence theory, rationality entails a calculated assessment

of the costs and benefits associated with initiating a first strike versus adopting a retaliatory posture and waiting to deliver a second strike. Accordingly, the logic of rational deterrence theory prefers expectation over attack—as long as the defender possesses forces that enable survival, retaliation, and the ability to deliver a second strike. Under such conditions, the attacker rationally cannot design any war plan, since the first attack would be met with severe punishment. Therefore, when defense gains an advantage over offense, the rational logic of deterrence functions correctly (Cimbala, 2017, pp. 146-150). A credible threat exists when an aggressor, based on its rational cost-benefit analysis, perceives that the costs imposed by retaliation will exceed any potential gains from an attack. Consequently, Actor B must be convinced that Actor A will carry out its promised retaliation if attacked. Thus, if Actor A fails to effectively and convincingly communicate its commitment to punitive retaliation to Actor B, deterrence will not be established (Huth, 1988, p. 439). The fourth element of deterrence is the reputation of the deterring state, which is intrinsically tied to credibility. A state's credibility is, in part, derived from its historical record of using force against adversaries. Schelling posits that a state's past actions are a critical key to predicting its future behavior. Consequently, the transmission of costly signals by status-quo-oriented states is of paramount importance. Schelling defines reputation as the perception among other states of how that state is expected to act (reputation for act). Thus, a state with a strong reputation for resolve enhances the credibility of its deterrent threats (Schelling, 1966, p. 124).

Deterrence manifests in various forms, most broadly classified into "conventional deterrence" and "unconventional deterrence". Unconventional deterrence relies on the threat of using weapons of mass destruction, with "nuclear deterrence" being its primary variant. A critical distinction lies in the fact that these two types differ fundamentally in their theoretical foundations, operational mechanisms, and ultimate effects. The threats inherent in nuclear weapons vastly exceed those of conventional arms, therefore, nuclear deterrence represents the ideal type of deterrence (Mount and Vaddi, 2020, pp. 119-120). In general, deterrence refers to the act of preventing an actor from undertaking a specific action through the instillation of fear. Within this framework, a deterring (or defending) state, when confronted with a perceived threat from an aggressor, aims to change the aggressor's calculus by threatening massive retaliation and thereby signaling the prospect of severe

punishment (Brown and Arnold, 2010, p. 295).

According to Morgan's view, conventional and nuclear deterrence share fundamental common elements. These are: 1) the existence of a conflict or competition between two or more actors that raises the prospect of military force being employed; 2) the assumption of actor rationality, allowing for a cost-benefit calculus (i.e., a rational assessment of the gains and losses associated with either attack or restraint); 3) the prevention of war through the threat of retaliation, where the anticipated costs of an attack for the aggressor or challenger significantly outweigh any perceived benefits; and 4) the fear of punitive retaliation by the deterring actor, which serves to restrain the aggressor. Consequently, the military capability of the deterring actor is a critical factor for successful deterrence (Morgan, 1983, 2003). A concluding note on deterrence is that it—whether nuclear or conventional—can be conceptualized in two forms: direct and extended. Extended nuclear deterrence refers to a strategy whereby a nuclear-armed state (the guarantor) employs its nuclear threat to deter an attack against its allies or partners, thereby extending its protective umbrella over them (Saur, 2022, p. 511). This strategy, often termed the "nuclear umbrella," manifests in two primary forms: 1) a security guarantee backed by the deployment of strategic nuclear weapons on the protector state's own territory, or 2) the forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons on the soil of the protected ally. Crucially, it should be emphasized that extended deterrence inherently possesses far less credibility than direct deterrence. As Morgan argues, a central dilemma of extended deterrence is the uncertainty regarding the level of cost or risk the protector state is ultimately willing to accept on behalf of its ally (Morgan, 1983, p. 86).



Source: Research Findings

Figure (1): Typology and Levels of Deterrence

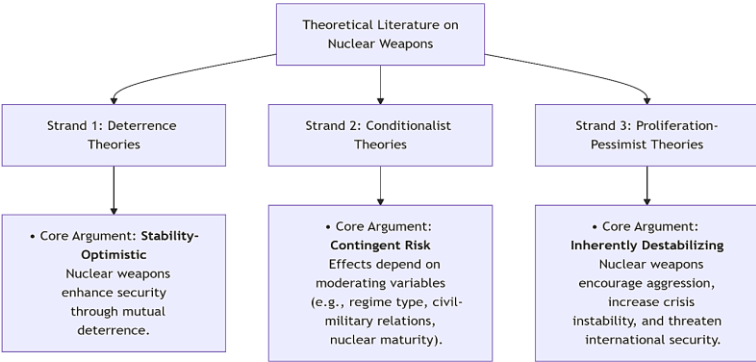
2. Review of the Literature

A review of the existing literature concerning the paradox of nuclear weapons' stabilizing versus destabilizing effects reveals three broad theoretical strands: deterrence theories, which argue for the security-enhancing and peace-promoting consequences of nuclear weapons proliferation, grounded in the logic of mutual assured destruction and strategic stability; conditional risk theories, which posit that the peril associated with nuclear weapons is contingent upon intervening or moderating variables, such as regime type, doctrinal posture, or crisis management mechanisms; and inherent threat theories, which contend that nuclear weapons unambiguously threaten international security by emboldening possessor states and amplifying their aggressive, risk-acceptant tendencies. Given that this research focuses on nuclear deterrence, the first strand will form the core of our theoretical framework and inform the primary analysis.

A notable example from the second strand of literature is the article titled "Nuclear Weapons and Interstate Conflict: The Moderating Influence of Civil-Military Relations." In addressing the central paradox of nuclear weapons' effects, the author shifts the analytical focus to the role of domestic institutions that formulate and influence state security policy. Specifically, the argument highlights the crucial moderating effect of the nature and dynamics of civil-military relations within a state as a key variable determining whether nuclear weapons lead to restraint or aggression (Asghar, 2024, p. 4). In summary, scholars of this strand argue that nuclear capability has an emboldening effect, enhancing a state's

capacity and propensity to initiate conflict. The critical intervening variable, however, is the degree of civilian control over the military. Where civilian oversight is weak, the risks of nuclear escalation and the state's belligerent inclinations are significantly amplified. Consequently, the process of national security policy formulation—specifically, the institutional structure and balance of power within the decision-making apparatus—is a paramount factor in determining whether a nuclear-armed state will exhibit aggression or restraint (Choi and James, 2008). Other scholars within this theoretical strand point to additional moderating variables. For instance, Michael C. Horowitz (2009) argues that a key factor is the state's level of nuclear maturity—specifically, the duration of its possession of nuclear weapons. This temporal dimension can significantly shape whether a nuclear-armed state's behavior tends toward aggression or restraint.

The third strand of literature, which views nuclear weapons as an inherent threat, is substantiated by empirical research. Scholars in this category utilize historical and statistical evidence to argue for the destabilizing nature of these weapons. For instance, according to Geller (1990), evidence indicates that due to concerns over potential preventive wars, crises involving nuclear-armed states escalate to dangerous levels more frequently than those involving other states. From Lavoy's perspective as well, nuclear weapons make conventional conflicts more probable, as nuclear powers act as belligerent states and use their nuclear capabilities to intimidate other states (Lavoy, 199). In the same vein, Rauchhaus (2009) argues that, according to empirical evidence, nuclear-armed states are more likely than non-nuclear states to intervene in unconventional conflicts. This is because these states, due to possessing nuclear weapons and the boldness it engenders, cannot exercise significant restraint in low-level conflicts. Bell (2019) advances a similar argument, contending that nuclear weapons function as a protective shield or security shelter for their possessors. This shielded position, however, paradoxically fosters more aggressive and offensive foreign policy behavior. The assurance against existential retaliation emboldens nuclear-armed states, lowering their risk perception and encouraging coercive or adventurous actions they might otherwise avoid.

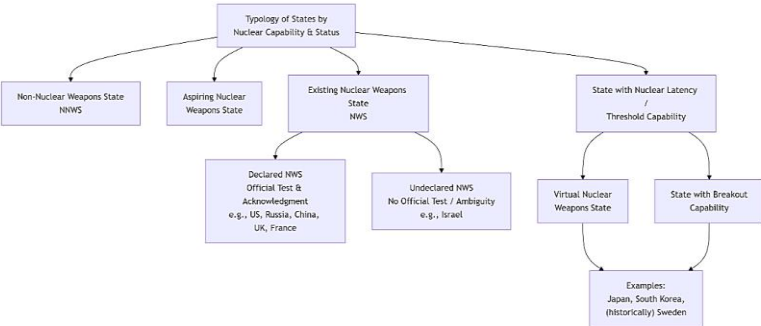


Source: Research Findings

Figure (2): Theoretical Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Stability

3. A Typology of Nuclear-Armed States' Behavior

A general typology of states based on nuclear capability includes three primary categories: existing nuclear power states (NPS) that possess and have deployed nuclear arsenals; aspiring nuclear weapons states actively seeking to acquire or develop nuclear weapons; and non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) that do not possess nuclear weapons and are not actively pursuing them (see Figure 3). Nuclear power states themselves are further divided into two subcategories: nuclear-armed states (those that have officially conducted nuclear tests) and nuclear-capable states (such as Japan or South Korea) (Miller and Sagan, 2009, p. 9).



Source: Research Findings

Figure (3): A Typology of States Based on Nuclear Capability & Status

From the perspective of massive retaliation deterrence (nuclear superiority), the only use for nuclear weapons should be the threat of a disproportionate massive retaliation against potential challengers which is also referred to as the No First Use (NFU) policy (Brodie, 1959). This type of deterrence is also referred to as "deterrence by punishment," which necessitates nuclear superiority. According to this perspective, the widespread proliferation of nuclear weapons would ensure security and stability, and war would be deterred under the threat of massive retaliation (Kang and Kugler, 2023, p. 659). The second generation of classical deterrence theory is grounded in the realist tradition of International Relations. This theoretical strand posits that the constant fear instilled by the proliferation of nuclear weapons constitutes the very cost of maintaining peace in the nuclear era, a peace sustained by the mechanism of deterrence (Kroening, 2015; Mearsheimer, 1990). Unlike the previous theories that emphasized nuclear superiority, this category of theories emphasizes nuclear balance in creating effective deterrence. According to this view, nuclear war can only be avoided under conditions of "Mutual Assured Destruction" and where nuclear capabilities among states are completely equal. In contrast, the "massive retaliation posture" does not provide stable conditions. Waltz (1981) makes the clear distinction between nuclear and conventional wars concerning their costs. Since any war objective should be commensurate with its cost, the proliferation of nuclear weapons will enhance nuclear stability by making the cost of wars prohibitive. This view has been widely accepted by advocates of classical deterrence, arguing that more bombs make us safer. They argue that balance of power reduces the likelihood of conflict, but conventional balances cannot fully secure peace because the costs are "acceptable". Accordingly, an impressive number of classical deterrence theorists welcome the spread of nuclear weapons, contending "the more horrible the prospect of war, the less likely it is to occur" (Mearsheimer, 1984), and "the probability of major war among states having nuclear weapons approaches zero" (Waltz, 1988, p. 627). This interpretation brings Waltz closer to Schelling's concept of "strategic stability." The goal of nuclear deterrence is neither an effective defense, nor a plan for military victory, but rather the maintenance of 'strategic stability,' which at a minimum would guarantee survival (Schelling, 1966). As an operational concept, strategic stability shares features in common with the notion of a balance of power. According to Schelling, balance itself—meaning being in an equal position—does not create

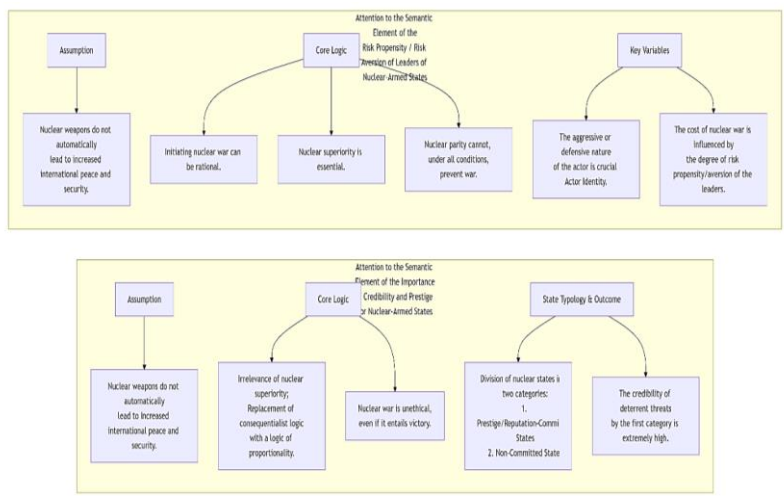
mutual deterrence; rather, it is the stability of the balance that establishes it. This means that neither side should be able to eliminate the other's ability to deliver a second strike with a first strike. Thus, strategic stability is achieved through the capacity to absorb a first strike and retaliate in kind (Hartington, 2016, p. 100).

The third group of theorists believe that strategic nuclear superiority would reduce the likelihood of crisis between nuclear states. This is a key implication of the nuclear competition school. If a favorable nuclear balance produces tangible political benefits, as claimed by the nuclear competition school, nuclear supremacy should also deter the initiation of nuclear crises by opponents (Suh, 2022, p. 340). This is while one of the main assumptions of nuclear revolution theory is the rejection of the benefits of nuclear superiority (Waltz, 1990; Jervis, 1979, 1984, 1989; Glaser, 1990). Jervis (1979/1980) argues it does not matter which side has more nuclear weapons, adding, 'deterrence comes from having enough weapons to destroy the other's cities; this capability is an absolute, not a relative, one'. Waltz (1990, p. 738) also agrees: 'for deterrence one asks how much is enough, and enough is defined as "having a second-strike capability" two countries with second-strike forces have the same amount of strategic power adding more weapons does not change the effective military balance'.

According to the hypothesis of this study, to typologize the behavior of nuclear-armed states and their propensity toward belligerence or conflict-aversion—which directly impacts international peace and security—two crucial semantic elements must be considered; elements that have been overlooked in deterrence theories. The first element is "the degree of risk propensity or risk aversion" among the leaders of these states. In this regard, it must be stated that for national leaders, the cost of war is highly significant, and there is no doubt that nuclear weapons increase the costs of war. However, the existence of these weapons cannot, under all circumstances, prevent the escalation of conventional war to nuclear war. According to this view, particular attention must be paid to the risk propensity or risk aversion of foreign policy decision-makers in relation to the use of nuclear weapons and their choices, as this factor has a crucial impact on the failure or success of nuclear deterrence. This stands in contrast to the strong assumption in deterrence theories that decision-makers' risk tolerance is zero (Zagare and Kilgour, 2000). Consequently, this perspective argues that leaders who are dissatisfied with the status quo, inherently aggressive, and risk acceptant are inclined to

initiate or engage in costly and high-risk conflicts, driven by the expectation of achieving a decisive strategic victory (Kang and Kugler, 2023, p. 660). This framework posits Actor A as the revisionist challenger and Actor B as the status quo defender. The sequence unfolds in three stages: crisis onset, diplomatic resolution attempt, and escalation calculus. Deterrence fails when a dissatisfied, risk acceptant challenger prefers to bear the costs of war to overturn the status quo, and the defender is unwilling or unable to offer a sufficient concession (Zagare, 2004, p. 116). Finally, while according to classical deterrence theories, states do not deliberately and rationally move toward nuclear war, according to this view, even resorting to nuclear war can be considered entirely rational. Under this perspective, great powers pursue nuclear superiority, not nuclear balance, and nuclear war can also be seen as the result of a rational calculation to achieve specific political objectives (Zagare and Kilgour, 2000).

Another issue that must be considered in describing and assessing nuclear deterrence and typologizing the behavior of nuclear-armed states is reflecting on the element of "reputation or prestige" of an actor regarding the use or non-use of nuclear weapons, which can be viewed as self-deterrence. This means that the deterring state believes that even if the use of conventional or nuclear force against the challenger state results in decisive military victory, it would come at the cost of losing that state's credibility and prestige. In this type of deterrence, the "logic of proportionality" replaces the "logic of consequences" (Paul, 2015, p. 39). Therefore, by adding the semantic element of the degree of importance a nuclear-armed state places on credibility and status, these states can be divided into two categories: "reputation/status-committed nuclear states" and "non-committed nuclear states." According to Schelling, reputation and prestige refer to the image a country holds in the eyes of other countries regarding how that country is expected to behave (see Figure 4). Thus, this reputation is directly linked to a country's commitments and its track record of adhering to them, as well as the expectations others have of it. If a country enjoys a good reputation and prestige in this regard, the credibility of its deterrent threats also increases (Schelling, 1966, p. 124).



Source: Research Findings

Figure (4): Typology of Nuclear-Armed States' Behavior Based on Semantic Elements

4. Zionist Entity as a Nuclear-Armed State in Confrontation with Iran

Based on deterrence theories, two general scenarios can be outlined regarding how Zionist entity deals with the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the first scenario, which aligns with the theory of "deterrence through massive retaliation" as well as the theory of "nuclear competition," "nuclear superiority" of either side is crucial in the deterrence between Zionist entity and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, both sides must strive to achieve nuclear superiority over the other. Therefore, in this scenario, Zionist leaders will be deeply concerned about the expansion of the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear capabilities. On the other hand, since according to this theory, "leaders' risk tolerance is zero," and furthermore, the nuclear-superior state is committed to "no first use" against its rival, Zionist leaders, as possessors of nuclear weapons, will not risk initiating nuclear war or using such weapons against Iran and will not launch a first strike. Nevertheless, through their speech acts, they convey explicit threats signaling massive retaliation and deterrence by punishment. Consequently, within this strategic framework, Zionist entity—as a nuclear weapons state—threatens a nuclear response to an attack by Iran, a non-nuclear state (i.e., a nuclear punishment strategy). In essence, this strategy adopts

an approach of "threatening asymmetric escalation," which entails deterring conventional or non-nuclear attacks by threatening the rapid employment of nuclear weapons.

In the second scenario, based on the theory of "deterrence through mutual assured destruction," the element of "nuclear superiority" is not important in the deterrence between Zionist entity and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Merely the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved the capability to produce nuclear weapons is sufficient to deter Zionist entity from launching an attack and a first strike. On the other hand, since according to this theory "leaders' risk tolerance is zero," Zionist leaders would not carry out a nuclear first strike, because the high cost of nuclear war makes nuclear-armed states cautious and restrained, reducing the probability of war to zero. Therefore, according to this view, if the Islamic Republic of Iran acquires nuclear weapons, the probability of war between this state and Zionist entity will drop to zero due to the existence of nuclear balance. In this scenario, Zionist leaders seek "stability in strategic balance" in relation to Iran. This means that neither side can, with a first strike, eliminate the other side's ability to deliver a second strike. Because strategic stability is achieved through the capacity to absorb a first strike and retaliate in kind. Under these conditions, Zionist entity also employs a "tit-for-tat" strategy to counter Iranian threats. This strategy communicates to Iran that Zionist entity will respond to a nuclear attack with nuclear retaliation and to a conventional attack with conventional retaliation.

Both scenarios share a common element of deterrence: Zionist leadership's employment of a deterrence-by-denial strategy. Under this approach, Zionist entity, as a nuclear weapon state, aims to deny any potential gains that Iran might seek to achieve through an attack. Consequently, Zionist entity is likely to employ a combined deterrence posture, integrating elements of both deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial.

According to the research hypothesis, a comprehensive analysis of Zionist entity's approach toward the Islamic Republic of Iran necessitates a focus on two semantic elements. The first is the degree of risk propensity versus risk aversion exhibited by Zionist entity's leadership when confronting threats from Iran. This perspective therefore rejects the classical deterrence axiom of "zero risk tolerance among decision-makers." Consequently, the likelihood of armed conflict between the Zionist state and Iran is posited to vary in correlation with the level of risk acceptance within Zionist entity's decision-making calculus. Within this

analytical framework, Zionist entity is cast as the revisionist challenger, seeking to alter the status quo, while Iran is positioned as the status-quo defender. The initial phase between these actors involves crisis onset, driven by the challenger's propensity to escalate through demands made upon Iran. The subsequent phase presents a potential pathway to de-escalation: should Iran accede to these demands via diplomatic channels, the crisis could resolve peacefully. However, this scenario is deemed improbable due to the prevailing absence of formal diplomacy and Iran's non-recognition of the Zionist state. Therefore, in the third stage, the aggressor actor (Zionist entity) will face two options: the decision to escalate the crisis and initiate war (from limited war to full-scale war), or the decision not to escalate the crisis and to retreat. The choice between these two options is entirely dependent on the degree of risk propensity of Zionist leaders. In this scenario, the defensive or offensive identity of Zionist leaders also acts as an intensifying variable. Concerning the second semantic element—the value placed on credibility and prestige by nuclear-armed states—it is imperative to examine Zionist entity's historical actions and its established patterns of conduct in response to perceived threats. Furthermore, analysis must consider the international reputation of the state; that is, the collective perception among other nations of how Zionist entity is expected to behave, which directly shapes the credibility of its deterrent posture.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to analyze and typologize the behavior of nuclear-armed states within the framework of nuclear deterrence. This typology—based on states' propensity for aggression versus restraint—serves as the analytical lens through which to assess the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on international peace and security. Accordingly, the central research question was formulated as follows: do nuclear weapons enhance deterrence, thereby restraining the possessor state from aggression, or do they embolden possessor states, transforming them into risk-acceptant actors that consequently generate insecurity and jeopardize international peace and security? What is the impact of nuclear weapons and their associated capabilities on the level of belligerence that nuclear-armed states exhibit toward their adversaries?

In response to this question, the hypothesis of this research was that nuclear weapons are inherently neither instruments of aggression nor deterrents to conflict; rather, the meaning that

leaders assign to these weapons is what matters. In other words, when assessing the nature of the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons on international peace and security, one must simultaneously consider two semantic factors: the degree of risk propensity or risk aversion of decision-making leaders in facing a crisis, and the importance of the credibility, status, and reputation of the nuclear-armed state in using or not using these weapons. Consequently, the deterrent efficacy of nuclear weapons—whether predicated on nuclear parity or nuclear superiority—is mediated by these two semantic variables.

Based on the research findings and the case study analyzing Zionist entity's conduct as a nuclear-armed actor toward Iran as a nuclear-capable state, several conclusions can be drawn. First, nuclear deterrence is a technical, political, and conceptual reality. Within this framework, the conceptual and theoretical significance attributed to nuclear deterrence plays a crucial role in comprehending the conduct of diverse state actors, including nuclear-armed states, states with nuclear latency, and nuclear aspirants. It seems that the impact of nuclear weapons on deterrence depends largely on who acquires them, why, and when. In other words, answering the following questions is also important: who is deterred from doing what, by whom, for what reason, by what threats, and under what conditions?

Second, another critical dimension in typologizing state behavior within nuclear deterrence is categorizing the states themselves according to their nuclear status. This includes distinguishing between nuclear-armed states, states that have conducted nuclear tests, states actively pursuing a nuclear weapons capability, and states possessing nuclear latency—that is, the technical capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons. A further critical factor in typologizing the behavior of nuclear-armed states is to distinguish between dissatisfied (revisionist) states and status quo-oriented (satisfied) states. Consistent with the arguments of numerous theorists, nuclear acquisition by dissatisfied states is posited to foster aggressive tendencies and incentivize actions aimed at disrupting regional and global order (Guthe, 2011). In contrast, nuclear weapons for status quo-preserving states serve solely defensive purposes—self-defense, defense of allies, and defense of the existing order. For example, nuclear weapons in countries such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom have purely defensive objectives. However, opposing viewpoints suggest that for great nuclear powers, nuclear weapons have an offensive aspect,

while for new nuclear-armed states, these weapons have a defensive aspect (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 511).

Third, a further critical consideration is the personality traits, political ideology, religious convictions, and personal worldview of the leaders governing nuclear-armed states. As posited in this study's hypothesis, nuclear weapons are intrinsically neither aggressive nor deterrent instruments; their strategic function is instead contingent upon the meaning imputed to them by political leadership and the intrinsic nature of the state itself. Another crucial dimension in typologizing the behavior of nuclear-armed states involves analyzing the perceptions held by both the leaders of these states and the leaders of their potential adversaries regarding two core aspects of the "security dilemma." The first is the adversary's perception: whether the leaders of the target state interpret the possessor's nuclear arsenal as defensive or offensive in nature. The second is the self-perception of the possessor state: whether its own leadership believes that offensive action holds a strategic advantage over defensive postures.

In light of these findings, it can be concluded that nuclear weapons do not possess a singular, uniform effect on international peace and security. Their impact is fundamentally mediated by the strategic culture, decision-making processes, and risk perceptions of the states that possess them. The case of Zionist entity's deterrence posture toward Iran illustrates this complexity: while Zionist entity's nuclear capability provides a powerful deterrent, its effectiveness is contingent upon the credibility of its threats, the risk tolerance of its leadership, and the reputation it has cultivated through its historical actions. The research demonstrates that the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons cannot be understood without a nuanced analysis of the semantic factors identified in this study. Each of these points can be examined as a serious research issue in future studies in the field of nuclear deterrence. It is hoped that the publication of this research will also be an effective step toward filling the existing conceptual and theoretical gaps regarding the typology of nuclear-armed states' behavior in relation to international peace and security.

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