

## Strategic Identity: A Comparative Framework for Analysing Nuclear Policies

### Abstract

In answer to the question “Why do states build or refrain from building nuclear weapons?,” different assumptions lead us to different theoretical frameworks. So there are many different and even contradictory assumptions and theoretical frameworks on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation, a situation that makes comparative analysis meaningful. The article reviews the major debates and theories of nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation first, and then explains an alternative theoretical framework. In fact, the author tries to present a comprehensive image of nuclearisation and nonnuclearisation debates and theories on one hand, and a new theoretical framework on the other hand. “Strategic Identity” as the new framework of this research criticises the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of nuclearisation debates and theories, and presents a new approach based on a mixture of internal, regional and international elements on one side, and incentives, processes and outcomes of both proliferation and nonproliferation on the other.

### Introduction

Comparative analysis of nuclear policies does not have long precedence, but as Sagan believes, “there is now a large literature on nuclear decision-making inside the states that have developed nuclear weapons and a smaller, but still significant, set of case studies of states’ decisions to refrain from developing nuclear weapons.”<sup>1</sup> With the explosion of the first nuclear bomb in 1945, some scholars in International Relations and strategic studies started paying specific attention to this new phenomenon and opened up study of the issue. And from then on comparative analysis of nuclear policies has acquired a rich body of literature.

The theoretical debate over how nuclear proliferation should be explained, and whether future nuclear proliferation can be predicted or not, has been given fresh impetus since the end of the Second World War, and “Realist” explanations of nuclear proliferation have dominated thinking about nuclear weapons since the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

The domination of Realist explanations has been so powerful that one scholar has argued, “The history of nuclear proliferation is a strategic chain reaction based on the realist logic of threat perception, spun off by an initial threat perception.”<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding, other scholars believe that there are two broad theoretical camps on the questions related to the causes of nuclear proliferation. The first camp takes the Realist view that states acquire nuclear weapons because of their security demands, and the second camp takes the Idealist (Liberalist) view that states obtain nuclear weapons because they “learn to stop worrying and love the bomb.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scott D. Sagan, ‘Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb’, *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996–97, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Tanya Ogilvie-White, ‘Is There a Theory of Nuclear Proliferation: An Analysis of the Contemporary Debate’, *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Fall 1996, pp. 43–44.

<sup>3</sup> Runa Das, ‘Engendering Post-Colonial Nuclear Policies through the Lens of Hindutva: Rethinking the Security Paradigm of India’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 22, No. 1–2, May 2002, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques E. C. Hymans, ‘Theories of Nuclear Proliferation; the State of the Field’, *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, November 2006, pp. 455.

Every theoretical explanation of nuclearisation is relevant to at least one of the Realist or Idealist views, although nobody can claim that either can fully explain nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. Realism and Idealism can only explain some of the dynamics of the issue, often leading to a distorted and over-simplified view of nuclear decision-making and nuclear behaviour.

Notwithstanding the fact that proliferation and nonproliferation are different, they are in fact two sides of the same coin. Realism is more able to explain proliferation, and Idealism focuses more on nonproliferation, whereas neither can explain both. In addition, Realism and Idealism mostly explain nuclear motivations, and for this reason are not sufficient for understanding incentives, processes and outcomes of nuclearisation. Ultimately then neither of these theories can help with all cases.

This reductionism of Realism and Idealism has led to the formation of alternative theories, with revisions. The most important revisions in Realism and idealism are Neo-realism and Neo-liberalism, which have opened another debate about proliferation and nonproliferation.

However, by limiting all theories of nuclearisation to Realism/Idealism and Neo-realism/Neo-liberalism debates, it is very difficult to gain an exact and comprehensive perception of this phenomenon and its relevant theories. In fact, these debates can only express a part of the paradigmatic explanations of the subject, and beyond and in opposition to them we face a critical debate that challenges the rationality of previous debates. In addition, theoretical approaches to proliferation and nonproliferation in every one of these debates are different. Hence, the different debates and theories operating at various analytical levels are crucial in considering both proliferation and nonproliferation phenomena.

The first and most important analytical level that considers proliferation and nonproliferation theories is the paradigmatic level, in which we face three main debates, some more optimistic than others.<sup>5</sup> The second level of analysis is the theoretical level that is more varied than the first. For a better and more exact understanding of these views, this survey focuses attention to Realism/Idealism (Liberalism), Neo-realism/Neo-liberalism, and Rationalism/Criticism as the three main debates at the first level. Second level theories also will be considered in five approaches, namely Security/External, Political/Internal, Economic/Technological, Psychological/Individual and Cultural/ Sociological, and systematic critiques help explain of an alternative theoretical framework.

### **Paradigmatic comparison**

At the paradigmatic level two modes of thought provide the foundation of comparative analysis of nuclear policies; proliferation pessimism and optimism,<sup>6</sup> which have been relevant to Idealist and Realist camps, such as in the work of Hymans.<sup>7</sup>

On one hand, proliferation pessimists like Sagan,<sup>8</sup> Blair<sup>9</sup> and Miller<sup>10</sup> argue that nuclear proliferation makes the world a more dangerous place. They believe that although the spread

<sup>5</sup> See: Peter Feaver, 'Optimists, Pessimists, and Theories of Nuclear Proliferation Management: Debate', *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Summer 1995, pp. 754–772; Robert W. Rauchhaus, *Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach*, Santa Barbara: University of California, 2007; Erik Gartzke and Matthew Kroenig, 'A Strategic Approach to Nuclear Proliferation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 2, April 2009, pp. 151–160.

<sup>6</sup> Feaver, 'Optimists, Pessimists...', pp. 754–772.

<sup>7</sup> Hymans, 'Theories of Nuclear ...'.

<sup>8</sup> Scott Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce G. Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War*, Washington DC: Brookings University Press, 1993.

of nuclear weapons in theory can lead to preventive military strikes, crisis instability and accidental nuclear detonations, contributing to greater levels of international stability, nuclear weapons may have destabilising systemic effects even as they improve the strategic positions of the states that possess them.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, optimists believe that nuclear proliferation is not a problem; because nuclear weapons have not proliferated.<sup>12</sup> According to what Kenneth Waltz as the most famous representative of this view, “if another country gets nuclear weapons, and if it does so for good reasons, then that is not an object of great worry”. In addition, he argues that it does not matter who has nuclear weapons; he believes “if a country has nuclear weapons, it will not be attacked militarily in ways that threaten its manifestly vital interests. That is 100 percent true without exception, over a period of more than fifty years.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, pessimism and optimism have root in Idealism and Realism as mainstream theories in International Relations, and have developed in Neo-liberalism and Neo-realism as the second generations of these line of thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

Although paradigmatic debate between adherents of these views is comparative automatically, and for this reason their opuses are important sources of comparative analysis of nuclear policies, what is more important is comparison between countries according to this debate. Based on the debate, optimists mention that nuclear proliferation in each country has root in its security threats and not only is not dangerous, but also is necessary for regional balance and deterrence.<sup>15</sup> Whereas pessimists like Sagan, try to challenge this conventional wisdom about nuclear proliferation.<sup>16</sup> Despite differentiations between these two mainstream theories in International Relations, there is also a big challenge between advocates of these line of thoughts as rationalists on one hand, and adherents of critical theory on the other hand.

In fact, the major line of contestation in a third debate is between rationalists and critics especially constructivists. In other words, the main debate is between all conventional theories, symbolised by rationalism on one side, and constructivism as the main representative of criticism on the other side.

Constructivism, emphasising “process” rather than agency and structure, which were important in the first two debates, and as the supposedly polar opposite in this debating constellation, challenges the assumptions of rationalism, particularly the notion of an unchanging reality of international politics. According to this theory, anarchy is an avoidable feature of international reality; it is, in Wendt’s famous words, “what states make of it.”<sup>17</sup> Constructivists argue that the social world is seen as constructed, not given. States may be self-interested but they continuously redefine what that means. Their identities may change, and norms help define

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<sup>10</sup> Steven E. Miller, ‘The Case against a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 67–80.

<sup>11</sup> Gartzke and Kroenig, ‘A Strategic Approach to Nuclear Proliferation’, p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> Feaver, ‘Optimists, Pessimists...’, pp. 754–762.

<sup>13</sup> See: Scott D. Sagan, Kenneth Waltz and Richard Betts, ‘A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?’, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2007, pp. 136–37.

<sup>14</sup> See: Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, New York: Norton, 2003; Sagan, Waltz and Betts, ‘A Nuclear Iran...’, pp. 136–142; Scott D. Sagan, ‘Rethinking the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation: Three Models in Search of a Bomb?’, in *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Interests, and World Order*, Victor A. Utgoff, (ed.), Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000, pp. 17–50.

<sup>15</sup> Sagan, Waltz and Betts, ‘A Nuclear Iran...’, pp. 137–146.

<sup>16</sup> Sagan, ‘Why Do States ...?’, p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 391–425.

situations and hence influence international practice in a significant way. This influence of identities and norms is explored by intersubjective meaning. Thus, the positivist conception of the social world and knowledge about it is challenged.<sup>18</sup> According to constructivism, as the main representative of criticism in opposition to rationalism, the spread of the nuclear weapons follows from changing identity and different strategic situations.

In fact, according to constructivist principles anarchy is not only unavoidable, but also identities and interests are not given, and for this reason, the nuclear policies of countries depend on their constructing strategic condition and identities. This means analysis of nuclear policies of each country should be focused on their special strategic identity, but also ask what strategic identity is and how we can explain it. This is the main question that we will trace back to it in the last section of the article.

### Theoretical comparison

In the second level, there are different categorisations of nuclear proliferation theories. Scott Sagan divides nuclearisation theories into three branches, including security, domestic politics and a norms model.<sup>19</sup> The security model has many adherents especially between realists and neo-realists.<sup>20</sup> However, advocates of the domestic politics and normative models, whose ideas have originated more from liberalism and neo-liberalism and refer to domestic factors, are not less important.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, a division based on external and domestic motivations is another categorisation of the issue.<sup>22</sup>

Mixing these categorisations, Saira Khan enumerates three systemic, domestic and individual levels of analysis,<sup>23</sup> and Ogilvie-White divides all theories into four sets.<sup>24</sup> These divisions have been extended by others,<sup>25</sup> but based on the above categorisations, and with regard to differentiation between paradigmatic debates and theoretical approaches, in this study all theoretical opuses about nuclear policies are considered in five approaches:

<sup>18</sup> Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Sagan, 'Why Do States ...?', p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979; John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Summer 1990, pp. 5–56; Benjamin Frankel, 'The Brooding Shadow: Systemic Incentives and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation', in: *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results*, Zachary S. Davis and Benjamin Frankel (eds), Portland: Frank Cass, 1993, pp. 37–78.

<sup>21</sup> George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; Etel Solingen, 'The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 126–169; Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Alternative Paths in East Asia and the Middle East*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007; Peter J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Suzette R. Grillot and William J. Long, 'Ideas, Beliefs, and Nuclear Policies: The Cases of South Africa and Ukraine', *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 24–40; Alexander H. Montgomery, 'Ringing in Proliferation: How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb Network', *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Fall 2005, pp. 153–87; Glenn Chafetz, et al., 'Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarussian and Ukranian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 4, December 1996, pp. 727–57.

<sup>22</sup> Sonali Singh and Christopher R. Way, *Paths to Nonproliferation: The Need for a Quantitative Test of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation Theory*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Saira Khan, *Iran and Nuclear Weapons: Protracted Conflict and Proliferation*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ogilvie-White, 'Is There a Theory ....'.

<sup>25</sup> Rahman Ghahramanpour, *Iran's Nuclear Issue and the Major Powers* [Roykarde Ghodratha-e Bozorg be Mozo-e Hasteh-e-e Iran], Tehran: Islamic Azad University Press, 2008, pp. 20–72.

**1. The security/external approach:** In most of the theoretical opuses on the issue, there is a special emphasis on security considerations as the main factor behind countries aiming to have nuclear weapons. The literature has traditionally focused on the presence or absence of a security threat on one hand, and a security guarantee from a powerful alliance partner on the other hand.<sup>26</sup> In fact, based on this view the acquisition of nuclear weapons and forging of alliances serve as substitutes in the quest for security.<sup>27</sup> It is according to this argument that some scholars differentiate between impacts of bipolar and multi-polar international systems on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation.<sup>28</sup>

**2. The political/internal approach:** In contrast to the previous approach, some scholars argue that internal elements are more important than external in nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. This is based on the elements that from the point of view of some scholars, are regime type or democracy,<sup>29</sup> and for others economic independence and liberalising governments<sup>30</sup> play a significant role in nuclear proliferation. In addition, an autonomous domestic elite<sup>31</sup> and symbolic/status motivations<sup>32</sup> are the other domestic factors are considered here.<sup>33</sup>

The aforementioned factors cover most domestic elements related to nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation and are so wide that they may overlap with the other domestic approaches. Therefore, to prevent such overlapping in components of these approaches on one hand, and elements of the other domestic approaches on the other hand, this survey considers three factors including regime-type, decision-making process and public policy under the political/internal approach, and the other elements will be considered under the title of the other following domestic approaches.

**3. The economic/technological approach:** Arguments in this approach emphasise economic preliminaries and attainment of the requisite nuclear technology as the main driving force behind the spread of nuclear weapons. Based on economic assumptions, such as the cost of placing, trading and investment ties as risk increases, states will become more cautious about pursuing nuclear weapons.<sup>34</sup> According to the technological imperative argument, states may achieve the

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<sup>26</sup> See: Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; William C. Potter, *Nuclear Power and Nonproliferation: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager Gunn & Hain, 1982; Ashok Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond: India's Nuclear Behaviour*, New Delhi & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Richard K. Betts, 'Paranoids, Pygmies, Pariahs and Nonproliferation Revisited', in *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread (and what results)*, Zachary S. Davis and Benjamin Frankel (eds), Portland: Frank Cass & Company, 1993; Zachary S. Davis, 'The Realist Nuclear Regime', in Davis and Frankel, *The Proliferation Puzzle...*; Bradley A. Thayer, 'The Causes of Nuclear Proliferation and the Nonproliferation Regime', *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Spring 1995, pp. 463–519.

<sup>28</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future...'; Frankel, 'The Brooding Shadow...'

<sup>29</sup> Glenn Chafetz, 'The End of the Cold War and the Future of Nuclear Proliferation: An Alternative to the Neorealist Perspective', in Davis and Frankel, *The Proliferation Puzzle...*; Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb...*; Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, 'Democratization and the Danger of War', *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Summer 1995, pp. 5–38.

<sup>30</sup> Solingen, 'The Political Economy of...'; Solingen, *Regional Orders...*

<sup>31</sup> Michael Barletta, 'Nuclear Security and Diversionary Peace: Nuclear Confidence-Building in Argentina and Brazil', *National Security Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1999, pp. 19–38; Peter R. Lavoy, 'Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation', *Security Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3/4 Spring/Summer 1993, pp. 192–212.

<sup>32</sup> Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000; Scilla Elworthy, *How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986; Sagan, 'Rethinking the Causes...'

<sup>33</sup> Singh and Way, *Paths to Nonproliferation...*

<sup>34</sup> Solingen, 'The Political Economy...'; Solingen, *Regional Orders...*; Thazha V. Paul, *Power Versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons*, Ithaca: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2000.

capability due to their economic and industrial development.<sup>35</sup> The argument refers to traditional analysis about nuclear proliferation, which has been based on technological determinist hypotheses.<sup>36</sup>

**4. The psychological/individual approach:** This approach helps us to understand behaviours of proliferators based on the character of decision makers. Adherents of the approach, emphasising the linkage between beliefs and actions, argue that concepts of “belief systems,”<sup>37</sup> “epistemic communities”<sup>38</sup> and “national identity conceptions”<sup>39</sup> can help us to understand nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. These concepts have led scholars to consider the psychology of leaders based on the role of nuclear myth-maker<sup>40</sup> and the nuclear taboo.<sup>41</sup>

Addressing this approach, specifically in relation to nuclear proliferation, Peter Lavoy develops the “myth-maker” model based on the belief systems to explain why nuclear weapons spread.<sup>42</sup> Emmanuel Adler<sup>43</sup> uses the “epistemic communities” conception to find an answer for nuclear proliferation based on the role of elite beliefs. His study of US and USSR nuclear policies during the Cold War era is a comparative study, while Jacques Hymans’s book is more substantive.<sup>44</sup> He describes the behavioural aspects of leadership in India, Argentina, Australia, and France based on the “national identity conceptions” to show how and why countries aim for nuclear proliferation where comparative analysis of nuclear policies is imaginable.

**5. The cultural/sociological approach:** In this approach, there is a special focus on values, norms and attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, and symbols based on two strong concepts: “historical sociology” and “strategic culture.”

Historical sociology was used by Donald MacKenzie<sup>45</sup> to explain the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Based on the same subject, Steven Flank<sup>46</sup> shows how this approach presents a different understanding of the nuclear proliferation puzzle in India and South Africa. Although this approach represents an important step forward for those who hope to understand and explain the proliferation

<sup>35</sup> Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear...*; Lavoy, ‘Nuclear Myths and the Causes...’.

<sup>36</sup> Darryl Howlett, ‘Nuclear Proliferation’, in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 339–358.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Little and Steve Smith, *Belief Systems and International Relations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Hass, ‘Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Winter 1992, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006b.

<sup>40</sup> Lavoy, ‘Nuclear Myths and the Causes...’; Ernest R. May, *Lessons of the Past*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973; George W. Breslauer, ‘Explaining Soviet Policy Changes: Politics, Ideology and Learning’, in *Soviet Policy in Africa: From the Old to the New Thinking*, George W. Breslauer (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 196–216.

<sup>41</sup> Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Lavoy, ‘Nuclear Myths and the Causes...’, pp. 199–202.

<sup>43</sup> Emmanuel Adler, ‘The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Winter 1992, pp. 101–146.

<sup>44</sup> Hymans, *The Psychology of...*

<sup>45</sup> Donald Mackenzie, *Inventing Accuracy: A Historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Steven Flank, ‘Exploding The Black Box: The Historical Sociology of Nuclear Proliferation’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Winter 1993–4, pp. 270–277.

process, the main drawback of sociological approaches is that they involve so many dependent variables that make it difficult, if not impossible, to predict future proliferation.<sup>47</sup>

The strategic culture as a concept was first introduced by Jack Snyder,<sup>48</sup> though Ken Booth provided a detailed definition of the concept.<sup>49</sup> Following that, in the 1990s, a new generation of scholarly works reasserted the utility of cultural interpretations. In fact, theoretical works on strategic culture, domestic structures, and organisational culture advanced significantly in this period, intersecting ever more frequently with the rise of constructivism.

Based on the constructivism model, the path breaking 1992 work by Wendt argued that state identities and interests could be seen as “socially constructed by knowledgeable practice.”<sup>50</sup> According to Katzenstein and his colleagues,<sup>51</sup> constructivism recognises the importance of “intersubjective structures that give the material world meaning,” including norms, culture, identity and ideas on state behaviour or on international relations more generally.<sup>52</sup>

In the post-Cold War era, contemporary scholarship claims that a focus on strategic culture offers a valuable perspective on the role of culture in international security. It is due to these arguments that both scholars and practitioners have begun to interpret nuclear policy,<sup>53</sup> and nuclear tensions<sup>54</sup> through the lens of national identity and culture.

### A critical appraisal of the existing literature

A review on paradigmatic debates and theoretical approaches on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation shows clearly that not only there is no master theory on the issue, but also none of the existing theories can provide a satisfactory explanation of proliferation dynamics, although many of them provide important pieces of the puzzle,<sup>55</sup> in which based on the aforementioned reviews we can picture it in the following way (Table 1).

As discussed above, every debates and approaches just can explain a part of the proliferation puzzle. In fact, although it is clear that none of the existing theories can explain nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation completely, but there are differences between explanation capability of these paradigms and approaches. In addition, nobody can deny that the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of these theories are different, so critique of the existing literature should be based on criticizing the foundations.

<sup>47</sup> Ogilvie-White, ‘Is There a Theory ....’, p. 54.

<sup>48</sup> Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*, New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979, p. 121.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, p. 392.

<sup>51</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, et al., ‘International Organization and the Study of World Politics,’ *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Autumn 1998, pp. 645–85.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey S. Lantis, *Strategic Culture and Threat Assessment*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> See: Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and Its Armies*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996; Rajesh M. Basrur, ‘Nuclear Weapons and Indian Strategic Culture’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 2, March 2001, pp. 181–198; Runa Das, ‘State, Identity, and Representation of Danger: Competing World view on Indian Nuclearization’, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2008a, pp. 2–28; Muhammad Tayyeb Khan, *The Development of the Indian Nuclear Program: A Study in the History of Cultural Identity*, British International Studies Association Conference, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Frederick R. Strain, *Discerning Iran’s Nuclear Strategy: An Examination of Motivations, Strategic Culture and Rationality*, New York: United States Air Force, 1996; Homeira Moshirzadeh, ‘Discursive Foundation of Iran’s Nuclear Policy’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 4, December 2007, pp. 521–543.

<sup>55</sup> Ogilvie-White, ‘Is There a Theory....’, p. 55.

<i>Debates</i>	<i>Approaches</i>	<i>Views</i>
Realism/Idealism	Security/External	Security Threats
		Security Guarantee
Neo-realism/Neo-liberalism	Political/Internal	Regime-type
		Decision-making Process
		Public Policy
	Economic/Technological	Economic Interdependence and Liberalism
		Technical Imperative
	Psychological/Individual	Nuclear Mythmaker
Nuclear Taboo		
Rationalism/Criticism	Cultural/Sociological	Historical Sociology
		Strategic Culture

**Table 1. Relation between debates, approaches and views on proliferation**

Such wise, the argument of this survey is based on the Rationalism-Criticism debate in paradigmatic level, and will present “strategic identity” with revision in the cultural/sociological approach.

The first step to criticize the existing literature is recognition of the third debate. Although some scholars believe that the debate between rationalism and criticism is not notable, and even describe it as a non-existent debate,<sup>56</sup> but it exists in reality, and has indicated its impacts on international relations theory.

It was not until the 1980s, and the onset of the so-called “third debate”, that questions relating to the politics of knowledge took hold seriously in the field of International Relations. In fact, during the 1980s, two debates structured IR scholarship, particularly within the American mainstream. The first was between neo-realists and neo-liberals, both of which sought to apply the logic of rationalist economic theory to international relations, but reached radically different conclusions about the potential for international cooperation, and the second was between rationalists and critical theorists, that challenged the epistemological, methodological, ontological and normative assumptions of both neo-realism and neo-liberalism.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, the debate between neo-realists and neo-liberalists is often characterized as a debate between those who think that states are preoccupied with *relative* gains versus those who think that states are more interested in *absolute* gains.<sup>58</sup> Whereas both of these theories stand

<sup>56</sup> Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International...*, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, in *Theories of International Relations*, Scott Burchill, et al., 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 188.

<sup>58</sup> Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, p. 191.



united against the modern and postmodern critical theories, which Mark Hoffman has characterised in terms of a distinction between “anti-foundationalism” and “minimal foundationalism.”<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, while neo-realists and neo-liberals engaged in a rationalist family feud, critical theorists challenge the very foundations of the rationalist project. Ontologically, they criticise the image of social actors as atomistic egoists, replacing that with intersubjective social structures. Epistemologically, they challenge the value of structure as given, and emphasise identity in shaping interests and political action. Methodologically, they question the neo-positivism of Lakatosian forms of social science, calling for interpretive modes of understanding, attuned to the unquantifiable nature of many social phenomena and the inherent subjectivity of all observation. And normatively, they condemn the notion of value-neutral theorising, arguing that all knowledge is wedded to interests, and that theories should be explicitly committed to exposing and dismantling structures of domination and oppression.<sup>60</sup>

Although critics’ arguments are in opposition to rationalists, and critics challenge the principles of both neo-realists and neo-liberalists, they are also varied. All postmodernists, poststructuralists, critical theorists in the Frankfurt School, feminists and constructivists have a critical attitude, but the role of constructivism in international relations theory is outstanding in comparison to the others.

In fact, the principal axis of the third debate now lies between rationalists and constructivists. This means that if critical theory in the debate neglected conceptual elaboration and sustained empirical analysis, constructivists have taken up this neglected dimension of the critical project, employing the ontological propositions, conceptual frameworks and methods of critical social theory to illuminate many aspects of world politics, particularly those pertaining to the parameters and dynamics of moral community.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, the establishment of critical social theory has been just one of the reasons behind the rise of constructivism. The rise of constructivism was prompted by four factors. First, the response by neo-liberals and neo-realists to criticism; second, the end of the Cold War; third, the generational change of scholars in the beginning of the 1990s,<sup>62</sup> and finally, the advance of the new constructivist perspective was aided by the enthusiasm that mainstream scholars, who shifted the field from the margins to the mainstream of theoretical debate.<sup>63</sup> Any way constructivism under these circumstances in International Relations theory was introduced for the first time by Onuf

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<sup>59</sup> Mark Hoffman, ‘Restructuring, Reconstruction, Reinscription, Rearticulation: Four Voices in Critical International Theory’, *Millennium*, Vol. 20, No. 2, December 1991, pp. 169–185.

<sup>60</sup> Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, pp. 193–95.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Dangerous Liaisons?: Critical International Theory and Constructivism’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 3, September 1998, p. 263–64.

<sup>62</sup> See: Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995; Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; Rodney B. Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; M. Lynch, *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordanian Identity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Nina Tannenwald, ‘The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use’, *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3, Summer 1999, pp. 433–68; Heather Rae, *State Identities and the Homogenization of Peoples*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, pp. 195–96.

in 1989. He introduced the term “constructivism” to International Relations and then both Kratochwil<sup>64</sup> and Wendt<sup>65</sup> referred to this.

In contrast to those who offer a specific definition of constructivism, such as Adler who believes that constructivism “is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world,”<sup>66</sup> constructivists are different too. Some scholars have divided constructivists into modern and postmodern forms<sup>67</sup>, some in conventional and critical,<sup>68</sup> conventional, critical and postmodern<sup>69</sup> or even in systemic, unit-level and holistic forms.<sup>70</sup> However, what is more important is that all of these forms are different in ontological, epistemological and methodological realms with rationalists, and criticise them along these axes.

In other words, constructivism, which differs in ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations from rationalism, offers alternative understandings of a number of the central themes in IR theory, including the meaning of anarchy and balance of power, the relationship between state identity and interest, an elaboration of power, and the prospects for change in world politics.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, for a better understanding of the third debate, and explaining strategic identity, first one should consider the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of criticism in opposition to rationalism, and then explains strategic identity as an alternative approach to compare analysis of nuclear policies.

## 1. Ontological critique

As Wendt believes, perhaps the most common interpretation of the dispute between rationalists and constructivists is that it is about ontology, about what kind of “stuff” the international system is made of.<sup>72</sup> Constructivists have challenged three core ontological propositions about social life and their impacts on aspects of world politics, which make constructivism a distinct form of international relations theorising. The first proposition refers to the importance of normative or ideational structures as well as material structures, while the second ontological proposition asserts that identities constitute interests and actions, and the third ontological proposition claims that agents and structure are mutually constituted.<sup>73</sup> In fact, constructivism is characterised by an emphasis on the importance of normative as well as material

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<sup>64</sup> Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Friedrich V. Kratochwil, ‘The Embarrassment of Changes: Neo-realism as the Science of Realpolitik without Politics’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January 1993, pp. 63–80.

<sup>65</sup> See: Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What...’.

<sup>66</sup> Immanuel Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 1997, p. 322.

<sup>67</sup> Price and Reus-Smit, ‘Dangerous Liaisons?...’, p. 266.

<sup>68</sup> Ted Hopf, ‘The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory’, *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 1998, p. 181.

<sup>69</sup> Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International...*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, p. 189.

<sup>71</sup> Hopf, ‘The Promise of Constructivism in International...’, p. 172.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 35.

<sup>73</sup> Price and Reus-Smit, ‘Dangerous Liaisons?...’, pp. 266–67; see also Jeffrey Checkel, ‘The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory’, *World Politics*, Vol. 50, Issue 2, January 1998, pp. 324–348; Alexander Wendt, ‘Identity and Structural Change in International Politics’, in *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (eds), London: Lynne Rienner, 1996; Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International...*

structures, on the role of identity in shaping political action and on the mutually constitutive relationship between agents and structures.<sup>74</sup>

Firstly, constructivists focus on the intersubjective dimension of knowledge, shared ideas, norms, and values held by actors, because they wish to emphasise the social aspect of human existence; the role of shared ideas as an ideational structure constraining and shaping behaviour.<sup>75</sup> According to Wendt, behaviour is influenced by intersubjective rather than material structures. It is based on collective meanings through which actors acquire identities, that is, “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self.”<sup>76</sup> This allows constructivists to pose this structure as a causal force separate from the material structure of neo-realism.

The second ontological issue is related to taking identities and interests as “given.” According to the rationalist view, the production and reproduction of identities and interests is not at stake in social interaction. In the constructivist view, in contrast, actions continually produce and reproduce conceptions of “self” and “other”, and as such identities and interests are always in process and we can plausibly take them as given. The difference matters for the perceived nature of international politics and for the possibilities of structural change.<sup>77</sup>

Third, ideational structures and actors (agents) co-constitute and co-determine each other. Structures constitute actors in terms of their interests and identities, but structures are also produced, reproduced, and altered by the discursive practices of agents. In contrast to individualist anthologies which conceive of states as atomistic, rational and possessive, and as if their identities existed prior to or independent of social interaction,<sup>78</sup> critical international theory and constructivism are more interested in explaining how both individual actors and social structures emerge in, and are conditioned by history.<sup>79</sup>

## 2. Epistemological critique

Based on the epistemological critique, International Relations theories have polarised into two main camps. On one hand positivists or naturalists as a majority think that science is an epistemically privileged discourse through which we can gain a progressively truer understanding of the world, or advocates of “explanation.” On the other hand, post-positivists or anti-naturalists as a large minority do not recognise a privileged epistemic status for science in explaining the world out there, which we can term as advocates of “understanding” or “interpretative”. Positivism assumes that there is a distinction between subject and object. This seems to line up a materialist ontology with a positivist epistemology, and indeed most materialists in IR are positivists. Conversely, it is harder to sustain the subject-object distinction if society is ideas all the way down, since that means that human subjects in some sense create the objects

<sup>74</sup> Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, pp. 188–99.

<sup>75</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, ‘The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory’, *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2, January 1998, pp. 324–348; Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground...’; Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of It...’; Dale C. Copeland, ‘The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism’, in *Constructivism and International Relations*, Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander (eds), London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What ....’, p. 397.

<sup>77</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of...*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>78</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, ‘The Normative Structure of International Society’, in *Earthly Goods: Environmental Change and Social Justice*, Fen Osler Hampson and Judith Reppy (eds), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 100.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Devetak, ‘Critical Theory’, in *Theories of International Relations*, Burchill, Scottet.al, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 150; see also: Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, pp. 195–197; Copeland, ‘The Constructivist Challenge...’, p. 3.

their theories purport to explain. This seems to line up idealist ontology with a post-positivist epistemology, and indeed many idealists in IR are post-positivists.<sup>80</sup>

Rationalists subscribe to the tenets of what Steve Smith outlines as positivism. They believe that social phenomena may be explained in the same way as the natural world and those facts and values may be clearly separated. Their goal is to uncover regularities. Scientific enquiry, in their view, must rely on empirical validation or falsification.<sup>81</sup> The upshot of the rationalist position is therefore that actors and concepts are exogenously given. Actors act in this pre-given world according to the demands of instrumental reason.<sup>82</sup> Criticism and especially constructivism, as the supposedly polar opposite in this debating constellation, challenges the assumptions of rationalism.

In fact, against the positivism and empiricism of various forms of realism, critical international theory adopts a more hermeneutic approach, which conceives of social structures as having an intersubjective existence. “Structures are socially constructed”; that is, says Cox,<sup>83</sup> “they become a part of the objective world by virtue of their existence in the intersubjectivity of relevant groups of people.”<sup>84</sup> However, constructivism differs from first-wave critical theory, in its emphasis on empirical analysis. Some constructivists have continued to work at the meta-theoretical level,<sup>85</sup> but most have sought conceptual and theoretical illumination through the systematic analysis of empirical puzzles in world politics.

### 3. Methodological critique

On one level, the difference between rationalism and constructivism is merely that they ask different questions, and though questions and methods do not determine substantive theory, however, they are not always substantively innocent. There are at least two ways in which our questions and methods can affect the content of theorising. First, whether we take identities and interests as given can affect the importance of ideas and material forces. Neo-realists argue that state interests stem from the material structure of anarchy. This neo-realist analysis of identity and interest as given nevertheless implicitly concedes that the fundamental structure of international politics is material rather than social. Whereas, constructivists show how intersubjective conditions constitute material power and interests in the first place, not treat the latter as an idea-less starting point.<sup>86</sup>

According to this methodological critique, Wendt develops his argument against the background of neo-realism, specifically Kenneth Waltz’s work. Like Waltz, Wendt proposes a state-centric structural theory. His point contra Waltz is that the way international relations are conducted is socially constructed rather than trans-historically given. In Wendt’s conceptualisation,

<sup>80</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of...*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>81</sup> Steve Smith, ‘Positivism and Beyond’, in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International...*, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Cox, ‘Towards a Post-hegemonic Conceptualization of World Order: Reflections on the Relevance of Ibn Khaldun’, in *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, James N. Rosenau and Ernst O. Czempiel (eds), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 138.

<sup>84</sup> Devetak, ‘Critical Theory’, p. 150.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Wendt and Ian Shapiro, ‘The Misunderstood Promise of Realist Social Theory’, in *Contemporary Empirical Political Theory*, Kristen Monroe, (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp.166–187; Nicolas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1989.

<sup>86</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of...*, pp. 34–35.

structure does not exist apart from process, that is, the practices of actors.<sup>87</sup> Although Wendt agrees with neo-realists that the international system is characterised by anarchy and self-help, he argues against their claim that self-help is a necessary feature of anarchy.<sup>88</sup> Rather it is an institution developed and sustained through process.

Second is that a methodology can turn into a tacit ontology.<sup>89</sup> Rationalist methodology is not designed to explain identities and interests. It does not rule out explanations, but neither does it offer one itself. Neoliberals have so internalised a rationalist view of the international system that they automatically assume that the causes of state interests must be exogenous to the system. This dependence of theory on method has happened with rationalism in mainstream systemic IR theory. In such a context certain questions never get asked, certain possibilities never considered.<sup>90</sup>

With these revisions in ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations, constructivism has caused a return to a more sociological, historical and practice oriented form of international relations scholarship. Where rationalists had reduced the social to strategic interaction, denied the historical by positing disembodied, universal forms of rationality and reduced the practical art of politics to utility-maximising calculation, constructivists have re-imagined the social as a constitutive domain, reintroduced history as a realm of empirical inquiry and emphasised the variability of political practice.<sup>91</sup>

### Strategic identity as an alternative theoretical framework

For constructivists like Wendt, constructivism in its different strands is simultaneously too extreme and too limited in its attack on neo-realism. It is too extreme when it claims that it is “ideas all the way down,” namely, that all aspects of human reality are shaped by socialisation through discursive practices. Constructivism is too limited when it simply tests ideas as causal factors against realist variables such as power and interest, without exploring the degree to which these apparent “material” variables are really constituted by ideational processes.<sup>92</sup>

Although constructivism also has imperfections, it seems stronger than the other IR theories. Constructivism can “build a bridge”<sup>93</sup> between different approaches, provide a “via media”<sup>94</sup> and occupies “the middle ground.”<sup>95</sup> However, emphasis on the rationalist-constructivist debate as the centre of attention is more appropriate as far as constructivists seem markedly more interested in conducting a conversation with one side than the other. Maybe that is why some scholars even want to “synthesise” constructivism and rationalism.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What...’, p. 395.

<sup>88</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of...*, p.249.

<sup>89</sup> John Ruggie, ‘Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity’, *World Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Jan 1983, pp. 261–285.

<sup>90</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of...*, p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, p. 211.

<sup>92</sup> Copeland, ‘The Constructivist Challenge ...’, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle...’, p. 323.

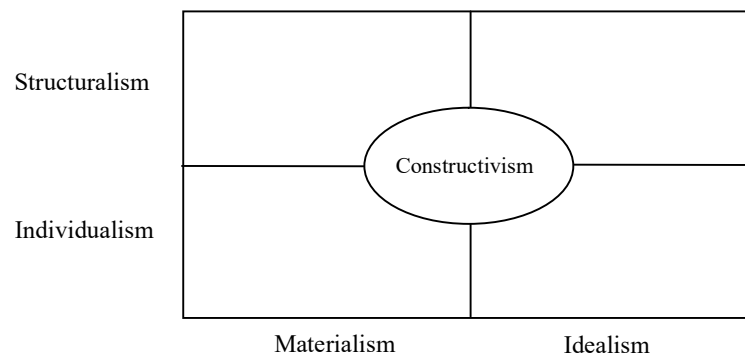
<sup>94</sup> Steve Smith, ‘New Approaches to International Theory’, in *The Globalization of World Politics*, John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 188.

<sup>95</sup> Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism and Beyond*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999, p. 217.

<sup>96</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, ‘International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 1997, p. 488; Alexander Wendt, ‘On the Via Media: A Response to the Critics’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 2000, pp. 179–80.

In fact, constructivism or synthesis of constructivism and rationalism is an attempt to build a bridge between the widely separated positivist/materialist and idealist/interpretive philosophies of social science. Although this attempt challenges the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of both realism and liberalism (rationalism), but it is not anti-realist or anti-liberal by ideological conviction.

Constructivism seizes the middle ground because it is interested in understanding how the material, subjective and intersubjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality, and because, rather than focusing exclusively on how structures constitute agents' identities and interests, it also seeks to explain how individual agents socially construct these structures in the first place. Consequently, constructivism belongs in the centre of Wendt's two-by-two matrix of international relations theories, which discriminates between realism (materialism) or idealism and holism or individualism such as Emanuel Adler<sup>97</sup> shows in the given below chart:



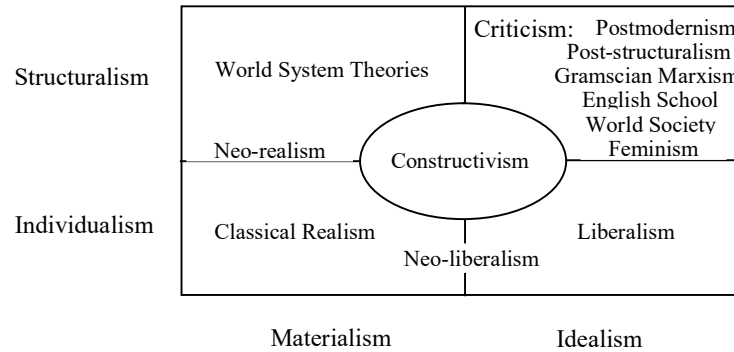
**Figure 1. Constructivism's synthesis approach**

As Wendt and Adler show, the realist, neo-realist and dependency theories of IR in the two left-hand quadrants are grounded in a purely materialist (structural or individualist) ontology, whereas liberalism and neo-liberalism theories in the bottom right quadrant are grounded in idealism. Theories in the upper-left quadrant are more holist, and materialist. They hypothesise that the properties of state agents are constructed in large part by material structures at the international level. Neo-realism bleeds into this corner to the extent that it emphasises the production of like units, but world-systems theory is more clearly holist and materialist. However, the principal challenge to first and second debates has come from scholars in the upper-right quadrant, in which all postmodernists, post-structuralists, feminists, Gramscian Marxists, and adherents of the English School and World Society alignment in criticism opposite to rationalism.

Classical realists have a materialist and individualist attitude towards social life. Classical realism holds that humannature is a crucial determinant of the national interest, which is an individualist argument because it implies state interests are not constructed by the international system. Like realism, liberalism emphasises the role of human nature, but unlike realism, it focuses on domestic factors in shaping state interests, and advocates an idealist view of structure. Neo-realism is more clearly materialist than classical realism, and attaches more explanatory weight to the structure of the international system, but insofar as it relies on micro-economic analogies, it assumes this structure only regulates behaviour, not constructs identities. Neo-liberalism also

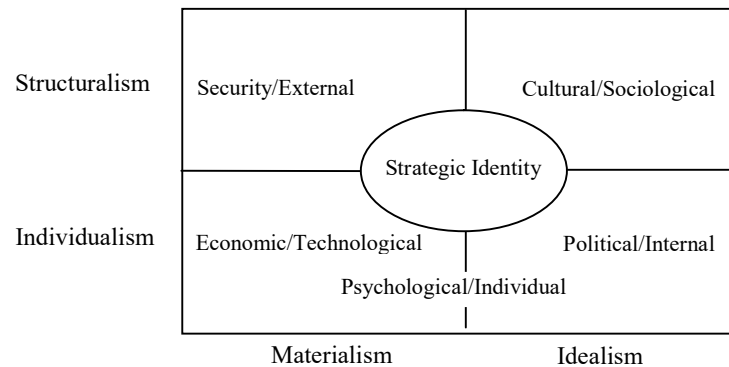
<sup>97</sup> Adler, 'Seizing the Middle....'.

shares with neo-realism in an individualist approach to structure, and most neoliberals have not challenged Waltz's view that power and interests are the material bases of the system, but unlike neo-realists, they suggest that individualists' ideas do matter, and see a relatively autonomous role for institutional superstructure.



**Figure 2. Constructivism's middle ground**

Constructivism middle ground means it sits in the middle of materialism-idealism debate on one hand, and individualism-structuralism (holism) on the other, as has been shown in the above figure. In this situation, constructivism can be both critical and problem solving.<sup>98</sup> It is a set of paradigmatic lenses through which we can find a synthesis-based way of considering nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation better. For this reason, it is useful to revise the constructivism's middle ground in adaptation with nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation theories like this:



**Figure 3. Strategic Identity as a middle ground approach**

According to above diagram, strategic identity is a middle ground approach, in which all other approaches have reflected. In adaptation with paradigmatic level that was discussed previously, the economic/technological and security/external approaches on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation that sit in the two left-hand quadrants are materialist (individualist or structural) ontologically. Whereas political/internal and cultural/ sociological approaches that reside in the right-hand quadrants are grounded in idealism, approaches in the upper quadrants are more holist (structural) than in the lower quadrants. The psychological/individual approach sits

<sup>98</sup> Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', in *Neorealism And Its Critics*, Robert Owen Keohane (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 208–209.

in the middle of two lower quadrants, because it is less individual than economic/technological approach and contains less idealism than political/internal approach.

Of course, difference between approaches is not just limited to what have been discussed above. In fact, each of these approaches leads us to different perspective in nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. It means they have strengths and weaknesses that will be more cleared in a comparative study. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with it in two stages; first, by projecting strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches in comparative review, and then by identifying strategic identity as an alternative approach.

<i>Theoretical approaches</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Comparative aspects</i>
<i>Security/External</i>	Explains role of security conditions and considerations	Neglects role of domestic elements and determinants	material holistic structure
<i>Political/Internal</i>	Analyzes role of domestic elements and determinants	Ignores role of external factors and threats	ideational individual agent/structure
<i>Economic/Technological</i>	Explains role of economic structures and technological determinants	Underestimates impact of security considerations as well as personal elements	material holistic process/structure
<i>Psychological/Individual</i>	Focuses on the role of personal specifications	Is not able to explain causes of social changes	ideational individual agent
<i>Cultural/Sociological</i>	Emphasizes on culture, history, identity and society	Very expanded and descriptive, and difficult to quantify	ideational holistic process

**Table 2. Strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches in comparative study**

In the abstract, it should be emphasised that strategic identity as an alternative approach moves beyond every other approach that have been discussed above and differs from existing approaches separately, but is not beyond all of them. In fact, strategic identity mixes the strengths of all existing approaches with revisions in ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of those at the paradigmatic level. In another phrase, it should primarily be noted that strategic identity is an approach, not a paradigm, but secondly as discussed so far, this new approach can exist with revisions in ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations to existing approaches in the paradigmatic level.

Strategic identity at the paradigmatic level belongs to the third debate and is very close to constructivism, which criticises all foundations of rationalism. At the theoretical level, notwithstanding the fact that it is closer to the cultural/sociological approach than others, it is also a middle ground approach. As discussed previously, the cultural/sociological approach with specific attention to history, culture and identity as social contexts of power and security, projects



the significance of these elements in international relations theory and substitutes process (as interaction between agent and structure) instead of structure or agent on their own. Therefore, it helps us for a better understanding of international politics at large and nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation in particular.

In fact, strategic identity closer to the cultural/sociological approach within the third debate challenges all the foundations of the existing literature. As with the third debate and indeed following it, it compounds material and ideational ontologies, blends positivist and post-positivist epistemologies and mixes causal/empirical and interpretive methodologies together. This means that strategic identity plays a role as a middle ground theory to explain nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. In other words, the approach even criticises the foundations of historical sociology and strategic culture and goes beyond them.

As some critics of realism argue, historical sociology as an alternative approach challenges the common association of Thucydides with the realist theory of the balance of power.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, pursuing this methodological critique into a sketching of historical explanation as an alternative approach is perhaps a better option for international relations. In fact, historical sociology is based on a basic methodological disjuncture between sociological and geopolitical forms of explanation, thus the first reasons for this stem from the nature of societies, and the second from conditions generated by the fact of their coexistence.<sup>100</sup>

Adherents of historical sociology believe that “history in any substantive sense is plural. It is diverse, multiple, and particular /.../ Not only are there many histories; there are many chronologies, many times...”<sup>101</sup> Emphasising “unevenness” as the most general law of the historical process, they conclude that there is not, and never has been, a single path taken by social development.<sup>102</sup> According to this methodological approach, historical sociology explains the role of technology in a social context, without adopting a deterministic approach. It moves away from the political determinism associated with many structural and domestic politics approaches, which assume that nuclear weapons proliferate because political elites desire them. In addition, by treating structures as social processes rather than as “givens,” historical sociology overcomes the agent-structure problem. However, it neglects the role of international system structure and ignores the significance of security threats.

In sum, historical sociology notes agent-structure in the internal realm, and blends material and ideational factors at the national level, whereas strategic culture pays attention to internal political identity and regional security considerations, but also neglects the role of the international system structure.

Although historical sociology and strategic culture compound material and ideational factors on one hand, and structural and individual elements on the other hand, and for this reason they apply middle ground following constructivism, they do so at the sub-national or national levels. For the purpose of identifying the weaknesses of these approaches, it should be noted that power, security and identity in the internal and external realms are important for understanding nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation.

<sup>99</sup> Rosenberg, ‘Secret Origins of ...’, pp. 131–159.

<sup>100</sup> Justin Rosenberg, ‘Why is There No International Historical Sociology’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 3, September 2006, p. 312.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 240.

<sup>102</sup> Rosenberg, ‘Why is There No...’, p. 313.

“Power” refers to human and state nature that was at the core of the first debate between realists and liberalists; “security” refers to world and regional structures that was the core of the second debate between neo-realists and neo-liberalists; “identity” refers to history, culture and society that is core of the third debate between rationalists and constructivists. All these elements are important taken beside each other to understand and explain both nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation, and strategic identity as a middle ground approach achieve its aims combing aspects of all of them. In fact, while historical sociology and strategic culture do not pay attention to all of these factors together, paying attention to strategic identity as an alternative approach is necessary.

It is for this reason that strategic identity performs the role of an alternative approach in this survey. According to the approach it is argued that three main factors, including Internal Political Identity (IPI), Regional Security Considerations (RSC) and the Structure of the International System (SIS) mutually construct nuclear policies. These three factors refer to three elements (power, security and identity), and indeed combining them at the ontological level enables us to mix all paradigmatic debates and theoretical approaches at the epistemological and methodological levels.

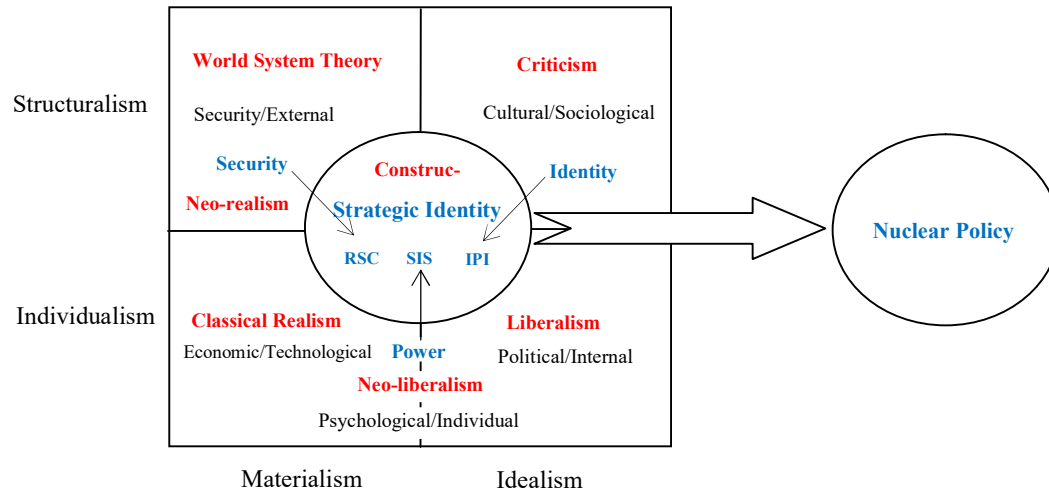
The structure of international system refers to the searching for power that ranks from national to world levels. Security considerations refer to the external threats ranking from regional to international levels, and identity refers to individual and national attitudes about self and others, is the basis of interests, power and security. Thus, according to the approach, nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation depends on a desire for power and searching for security based on the specific identity of each country.

In fact, historical, cultural and social identity on one hand, regional security considerations on the other hand, and finally the structure of the international system taken as mutually interdependent form strategic identity as an independent variable that influences nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation as dependent variable. In other words, based on this approach, in answer to the question “why do countries pursue nuclear proliferation or nonproliferation?” a mixture of the aforementioned elements and all levels of analysis should be deployed in a systemic way.

According to the alternative approach, at the ontological level, the specific identity of each country shapes its search for security and desire for power in regional and international levels. This means that both material and ideational elements mutually construct the nuclear policy of each country. At the epistemological level strategic identity as a new approach follows from criticism or constructivism, and while constructivism is a middle ground theory, strategic identity is treated as a middle ground approach too. This means, as constructivism attempts to synthesis realism, liberalism, neo-realism and neo-liberalism, strategic identity also tries to synthesis all positivist and post-positivist approaches on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. Finally, at the methodological level strategic identity performs a mixture of all empirical and interpretive methods following revisions at previous levels.

In fact, internal political identity, regional security considerations and the structure of the international system are the three main components of strategic identity, which reflect identity, security and power as the ontological foundation of the aforementioned debates and approaches. Mixing the elements leads us to put material and ideational as well as structural and individual phenomena beside each other. This revision helps us to combine all paradigmatic debates and

theoretical approaches on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation with each other. The relations between independent and dependent variables and linkage between debates and theories at the ontological, epistemological and methodological levels within the strategic identity as an alternative framework can be shown in the following diagram:



**Figure 4. Relations between variables and theoretical framework**

## Conclusion

The obtained results of this study affirmed that although discussion on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation has led to different theoretical frameworks in International Relations, but none of the existing theories are able to explain all aspects of nuclear policies in all countries. In fact, theories in this realm have strengths and weaknesses, while some are more powerful than the others. This research, based on the constructivism approach as a middle ground theory at the paradigmatic level, focused on “strategic identity” as an independent variable, has attempted to introduce it as an alternative framework to compare nuclear policies as a dependent variable.

In this survey, we have argued that internal political identity, regional security considerations, and the structure of international system are the three components of strategic identity and impact on the nuclear policies of countries. In fact, a combination of the three factors – desire of power, security, and identity – are important for understanding nuclear policies. Based on this approach, one discerns that the identity of each country shapes its interests, power, and security. So nuclear policy is a dependent variable which is constructible and not given. In addition while the identity of each country is unique, and the nuclear policy of each country follows its unique strategic identity, then logics of proliferation and nonproliferation are different based on different strategic identities.

The nuclear policies of countries can be compared by using strategic identity as an analytical framework. Comparative analysis between nuclear policies according to this approach is not only based on a conceptual framework, but is also based on its components in different cases. Comparing the nuclear policies of countries and investigation of their components in different countries, using this approach, could be a valuable future research topic.