"Can I imagine a world without nuclear weapons? Yes, I can. That's a world I didn't like."

General John Hyten, head of U.S. Strategic Command

Is strategic stability a viable solution for the current situation between Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia?

Deterrence, balance of power and nuclear weapons in the Middle East

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Abstract

This study has been conducted to examine the situation of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, more closely Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Starting from a neorealist perspective, the study argues that balance of power is needed in the region and nuclear proliferation may be a balancing tool. Consequently, the study hypothesizes that strategic stability, which is an outcome of nuclear deterrence, offers a solution to the to the situation among these three countries. Strategic stability can be achieved by nuclear proliferation therefore this study proposes that Iran and Saudi Arabia should proliferate to counterbalance Israel's nuclear hegemony in the region. When strategic stability is achieved, then as the theory holds, nuclear powers will not confront each other and thus, the region will be more stable. The study utilizes the work of Waltz, Mearsheimer, Kissinger, Parsi, Walton, Long, Colby, and Steinbruner to name a few. The findings have revealed that in theory strategic stability would be a viable solution to overcome the current situation, however given the complexity of the region and the relations among these countries, it is very unlikely to be achieved.

Introduction

If nuclear weapons mean the end of humanity, then people like General Hyten are the destroyers of our world (ICRC, 2015). General Hyten, as the Head of the U.S. Strategic Command, is in charge of the country's vast nuclear arsenal, yet he does not believe that nuclear weapons would bring an end to humanity. Rather, he maintains that they make our world safer and reduce the likelihood and brutality of conflicts (Politico, 2017). Wherein lies the truth? Are nuclear weapons the greatest threat to humanity among all weapons of mass destruction that could wipe off mankind as one side claims it (Sidel, 1989)? Or have nuclear weapons been "working for peace" as the other side argues (Waltz(a), 1981)? The debate over nuclear weapons is not a subject to this study per se but its implications will be important in analyzing and understanding the subject. This study takes the position of people like General Hyten and Kenneth Waltz and furthers it by explaining why more nuclear weapons, or nuclear proliferation to be exact, are or can be the guarantors of peace. To test the validity of such proposition, it is not enough to elaborate on theories but it is imperative to evaluate cases where nuclear proliferation takes place.

A state's nuclear arsenal primarily indicates how much power that state has in comparison to other states, as only a few states have nuclear weapons. Thus, having nuclear weapons in a region where no other states have it gives superiority to the state by the nuclear arsenal (Waltz(a), 1981). This upsets the balance of power. The upset in the balance in power leads to greater fear among the states, which then increases the likelihood of confrontation. The theory of balance of power is essentially about stability where having matching power capabilities diminishes the likelihood of confrontation according to the neorealist perspective (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). Consequently, rebalancing may be essential to overcome the power disparities, which may be achieved by proliferation of nuclear weapons as they are the most powerful and destructive weapons. The theory of strategic stability reflects on the assumption that it is possible to balance power and deter with nuclear weapons and hence reduce the probability of future conflicts (Bluth, 2010).

As nuclear deterrence theory is a part of the realist school, structural realist or neorealist to be exact, nuclear weapons are also about balance of power in this case. Realists claim that the balance of power should be at equilibrium, so that no country should be substantially stronger than the other because an upset in the balance is more likely to lead conflict as the weaker

feels threatened (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). In short, the advocates of nuclear proliferation like Steinbrunner (1978), Waltz (1981;2012), or Tertrais (2011) argue that nuclear proliferation leads to nuclear deterrence whereby two nuclear states will not go to war with each other as mutually assured destruction is guaranteed. If such deterrence is effective, that will lead to strategic stability, which implies that adversary nuclear powers will not engage in direct conflict knowing that both would be destroyed in a nuclear confrontation (Long, 2013). Whether strategic stability is an achievable reality or just a theory is a matter of further analysis. However, history indicates that nuclear deterrence has worked (Tertrais, 2011). During the Cold War, there never was major, direct confrontation among the main powers of the USSR, China and the U.S. and its allies (Walton, 2016). However, the Cold War is history now and literature on its different aspects is extensive, thus deterrence in the Cold War era is no subject of this study. A more interesting case of nuclear deterrence is India and Pakistan, which has not had a war after they both acquired nuclear weapons (Quinlan, 2005). Yet, the India-Pakistan case may be a bit too simple to elaborate on the implications of nuclear deterrence and strategic stability as they are neighboring enemy states with a long history of conflict over a disputed territory (Bluth, 2010). Many post-Soviet countries and South Africa, which was not part of any main alliance system, have given up their arsenals therefore they cannot be used for case studies to elaborate on nuclear proliferation (Sidhu, 2013). The case of North Korea will be excluded from this study given the history and complexity of its nuclear program and its implications on worldwide events.

This leaves us with one region where nuclear developments have taken place, and that is the Middle East (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Israel has been a nuclear power since the late 1960s, early 1970s even if they officially deny it, maintaining the policy of opacity (NTI(a), 2014). The other aspiring nuclear power is Iran, which given its adversary towards Israel, can be a second party to a nuclear deterrence situation (Waltz(b), 2012). The third party whose future nuclear program may be very relevant is Saudi Arabia, which has been engaged in a cold war with Iran but developing ties with Israel (Yaari, 2018). The other countries that are part of the wider Middle East-North Africa region have either given up their nuclear programs by now or have never aspired to become a nuclear power (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Therefore, given the current and future nuclear programs of these three countries and the complexity of their relationships, they can be used as case studies to elaborate on nuclear deterrence theory.

Further, the Middle East has arguably been the most conflict-ridden region in the past decades (Kissinger, 2014). Consequently, as the theory of strategic stability achieved by nuclear deterrence holds, nuclear proliferation can stabilize a region (Waltz(b), 2012). This proposition will be the base of this study.

On the map[1] above the geographical location of the three countries are visualized. it can be seen that the Persian Gulf divided Iran and Saudi Arabia, so they only share borders on the sea. Yet, they are very close to each other, and it can be seen how both can struggle for hegemony over the region given their location (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Israel and Saudi Arabia are very close to each other given their position in the Gulf of Aqaba but they have no land borders. It can also be seen that Iran and Israel are quite far away from each other,

[1] Source: Google maps

therefore confrontation on land seems very unlikely between them. As in this region Israel is the only nuclear power, which creates fear in Iran, that is why they began their nuclear program, which is only nominally peaceful (NTI(a), 2014). This could lead to domino-effect where Saudi Arabia would also feel threatened by Iran and start their own program (Webb, 2018). As strategic stability is then the outcome of effective nuclear deterrence (Bluth, 2010). Hence, it shall be argued that by means of nuclear proliferation, which leads to nuclear deterrence, and thus strategic stability can be achieved. Whether strategic stability makes the Middle East a safer and more stable place is the subject of this study.

The nuclear disarmament regime is widely accepted in the world nowadays but due to the complexity of power balance, or the lack thereof, makes nonproliferation unlikely in this region (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Therefore, it is important to reflect on the implications of nuclear proliferation as that seems more likely. Especially after President Trump's cancellation of the Iran deal, which was meant to keep Iran's nuclear program in check to ensure that no weapons would be produced (BBC, 2018).

Therefore, the research question is the following, "Is strategic stability a viable solution for the current situation between Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia?". In order to answer this question, first the methodology and the relevant case studies will be introduced. Second, a brief overview of the aforementioned three countries' nuclear programs will be summarized. Third, the literature review will be conducted to show what the academic literature has produced on nuclear deterrence theory, strategic stability and the Middle East. Fourth, a theoretical framework will be outlined based on existing literature and the existing gaps within the literature, which this study is meant to fill, will be revealed. Finally, before the concluding remarks, the analysis will disclose whether or to what extent nuclear proliferation can make the Middle East more stable and less prone to conflicts given the proposed validity of nuclear deterrence and its connection to the maintenance of the power balance and strategic stability.

Methodology

This research is both theoretically driven and policy-oriented. The evaluation of this study will be done by introducing and assessing the validity of strategic stability in the Middle East driven by the theory of nuclear deterrence. The theory of nuclear deterrence has been chosen because it has been argued by numerous scholars such as like Steinbrunner (1978), Waltz

(1981;2012), or Tertrais (2011) that nuclear deterrence can be a stabilizing tool in conflict-ridden regions. The rationale for choosing the Middle East as an example to test the validity and applicability of strategic stability has been outlined in the introduction. What needs to be added that these case studies given their existing or possible future nuclear programs provide good base for comparison. Further, given the complexity of the relationship among them, and tormented nature of the Middle East makes this region applicable to test the theory of nuclear deterrence. These case studies will be used to present how there could be a need for nuclear deterrence and to what extent strategic stability is obtainable in conflict regions. Although another case study, of India and Pakistan, is per se out of the focus of this research but it provides a good base of comparison to see how nuclear deterrence can work in real life. In other words, the case study of India and Pakistan aims to show if all Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia proliferate then what the deterrence situation could look like.

This study employs the hypothesis that strategic stability offers a solution to the complicated situation among Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. As it will be elaborated on in the literature review and in the analysis, scholars argue that nuclear proliferation creates effective deterrence among adversaries and leads to strategic stability whereby the likelihood of confrontation is diminished and consequently the region becomes more stable. To test the hypothesis first the nuclear programs of these three countries will be introduced to understand the history and the rationale behind their nuclear armament. Then the literature review will introduce the relevant theories around nuclear proliferation, its impacts and its current state in the Middle East. The gaps in the literature will also be highlighted and then explained how the analysis is meant to fill these gaps. The theoretical framework drawn from the literature review is meant to establish approaches towards the analysis and consequently this framework is intended to test the relevance and applicability of strategic stability.

Further, this thesis employs the assumption that the Middle East in its current state is an unstable region worsened by constant threats and proxy wars between the main powers (Kissinger, 2014). As Israel is the only one with a nuclear arsenal, its main adversary, Iran feels threatened (Riedel & Samore, 2008). The so-called Iran deal was to keep Iran's nuclear program in check but recent developments may cause an end to this deal and Iran will develop a nuclear arsenal (Erickson, 2016). This nevertheless can bring about positive developments for the region. As Waltz argues, if Iran builds its own nuclear arsenal, the likelihood of direct

confrontation between Israel and Iran will be less likely as it rebalances the power distribution in the region (Waltz(b), 2012). In other words, if there is more nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, then the stability, understood in terms of decreased likelihood of hostilities, will also increase. Put it differently, the cause is imbalance of power in the Middle East, as Israel seems to have hegemonic military power, and the effect is instability and increased confrontation in the region. To rebalance, as advocates of nuclear deterrence and strategic stability argue, nuclear proliferation is needed. This is the causal relationship found in, for example, Waltz's argument between stability and nuclear proliferation. Nevertheless, it is still an ongoing issue therefore it will be difficult to draw definite conclusions. Yet, the merit of the research is that shows that stability can be viewed from many points and that nuclear proliferation is not inherently a bad thing, it may be quite useful for a troubled region such as the Middle East.

As it was mentioned, the research will employ two kinds of methods, however, there is a certain hierarchy between the two methods. It is the hypothesized causality that drives the research but there is a need for case studies, even though the case studies are subordinate to the causal research conducted by the literature review and the analysis therefore this thesis is not a between-case analysis.

Nuclear programs of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia

This is section is meant to provide first a historical insight into the development and the rationale behind the nuclear program of these three countries. Having introduced such background information, it becomes clear why these opted or may opt for nuclear proliferation, what state their programs are and what the future may bring. Even though most of the information here is descriptive, it is essential to go into a few analytical remarks to fully comprehend the current state of these three countries' nuclear program. First, Israel's nuclear program will be summarized as that is the most advanced among all three (NTI(a), 2014). Then, Iran's complex situation will be outlined with regards to nuclear weapons. Finally, a short insight will be provided into Saudi Arabia's nuclear aspirations.

The nuclear program of Israel

It is widely believed that Israel started its nuclear program sometime in the 1950s (Beehner, 2006). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s attempted to disclose Israel's nuclear by spying and pressuring them to reveal the status of their program but these attempts were unsuccessful. While Eisenhower and Kennedy were keen on learning the facts about Israel's nuclear intentions, Johnson "had no intention of doing anything to stop the Israeli bomb (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 36). In 1969 Nixon made a deal with Israeli PM, Golda Meir, that the U.S. would not inspect or put limits on Israel's nuclear program if Israel did not carry out test or declare its nuclear capability (NTI(a), 2014). Consequently, it is then believed that with silent consent of its most important ally, Israel has been producing nuclear weapons at its Dimona facility since the late 1960s (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007).

Israel's first nuclear crisis arrived in 1973 when during the so-called Yom Kippur war, Israel was invaded by six Arab countries and almost defeated. The nuclear weapons were put on "strategic alert" but Meir decided not to use them (NTI(a), 2014). The Israelis had been acquiring tons of uranium from South Africa since 1965, and by 1975 the U.S. intelligence estimated that Israel had produced ten nuclear weapons. In 1979, Israel and South Africa allegedly carried out a nuclear test on the southern Indian Ocean. This became known as the Vela incident, and its culprits remain unknown but most hold Israel responsible for this testing (NTI(a), 2014).

As Israel still officially denies its nuclear power status, the size of its nuclear arsenal is still unknown, although there are estimates. The average estimation is around 200 nuclear warheads (Beehner, 2006) (Parsi, 2007). Others put the numbers much higher, claiming that Israel may possess 300 or even up to 400 nuclear warheads, making it the third largest nuclear arsenal after the U.S. and Russia (DePetris, 2018). More modest estimates put the actual number between 80 and 150 with the possibility to double or triple the stockpile fairly quick (NTI(a), 2014). Israel also possesses aircrafts, intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarines that deliver the nuclear warheads and enabling Israel to carry out a second strike if it is stroke by nuclear weapons (Riedel & Samore, 2008).

Israel, which has been surrounded by enemy nations since its foundation in 1948, began to develop its nuclear arsenal for self-defense and deterrence reasons. The desire to counter the neighbor states' "military asymmetry" drove PM Ben Gurion to turn to technological

superiority in the 1950s (Beehner, 2006). Consequently, it is then believed that Israel produced its first nuclear weapon in the late 1960s (NTI(a), 2014). In the 1990s a nuclear Pakistan and the prospect of a nuclear North Korea further affirmed Israel's need for nuclear weapons as experts find (Beehner, 2006). Nowadays, the (perceived) threat of a nuclear Iran is the main drive behind Israel's maintenance and possible proliferation of its nuclear arsenal (DePetris, 2018).

Iran's desire for the bomb

Iran's nuclear program or the desire to have one dates back to the 1950s just like Israel's. however, it was not until the 1970s when the Shah initiated the building of nuclear reactors. Nevertheless, 1979 revolution shattered these plans, and Iran would not go back to designing a new nuclear program until the late 1980s (NTI(b), 2018). Although it could be assumed that Iran-Israel antagonism is as old as their nuclear programs but in fact they maintained a relatively normal relationship during the Cold War. Iran's, and the Shah's, desire to have nuclear weapons originated in the will to be the strongest power in the Gulf region (Parsi, 2007). With the rise of Saddam's Iraq, Iran also felt need to defend and deter by such weapons. The bitter outcome of the Iraq-Iran war also highlighted Iran's vulnerability and its need to find new security measure that is why the regime decided to resume the nuclear program (Chubin, 1995). The rise of nuclear Pakistan and North Korea's nuclear initiative further encouraged Iran that is possible to be a regional nuclear power after the Cold War. it was only with the defeat of Saddam's Iraq in the Gulf War that made Iran to perceive Israel as its main adversary in the region. This was aggravated by the fact that it had already been widely known that Israel possessed nuclear weapons (Chubin, 1995). With Russian help, Iran began to lay the foundations of its nuclear program in the 1990s, and in 2002 its enrichment and heavy-water reactor programs were exposed (Riedel & Samore, 2008). During the 2000s and the early 2010s many diplomatic efforts were made to ensure that Iran would not seek to produce nuclear weapons, the most famous being the so-called Iran Nuclear, which is the matter of the next section. As of 2018, Iran has an effective nuclear enrichment programs and the facilities to produce nuclear weapons as well as missiles that could carry nuclear warheads. Iran's offensive nuclear aims seem obvious but it is a signatory to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons whereas for example Israel is not (NTI(b), 2018).

The hesitant third – Saudi Arabia and nuclear weapons

The Saudis expressed interest in nuclear weapons in the 1970s seeing the rise of nuclear Israel and India, and they are believed to have financed Pakistan's nuclear program (Webb, 2018). Currently, Saudi Arabia does not have nuclear weapons or a nuclear reactor and is a signatory to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Up until recently it was widely doubted that Saudi Arabia had ever had any intention to launch its own nuclear program (NTI(c), 2017). However, with the current tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia can have two implications. One, Saudi Arabia gets closer to Israel following the enemy of my enemy is my friend principle. Two, it starts its own nuclear program or purchases nuclear weapons from its allies. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman stated that if Iran develops nuclear weapons then Saudi Arabia has to do the same to guarantee its safety (Gaouette, 2018).

Literature review

The literature review will focus on four main issues. First, existing literature on the history, theory and merits of nuclear deterrence will be introduced. Second, the theory of strategic stability will be elaborated on with its implications to real-life scenarios and its possible shortcoming and limitations. Third, the role of perceived threat with regards to nuclear proliferation will be examined. This step aims to reveal whether there is a link between perceived threat and nuclear proliferation. Finally, having presented the relevant theories, the review will have two subsections. The first subsection will provide a detailed analysis on Iran's quest to acquire nuclear weapons based on existing literature with a special focus on Waltz's 2012 article "Why Iran should get the bomb". The second subsection is the review of literature on the India-Pakistan nuclear deterrence situation. The relevance of this case has already been reveled in the methodology, and in this section, it will become clear why this case is relevant and may well be comparable to the other three cases.

The objective of the literature review is to establish a theoretical framework, which can be utilized to present how what are the origins of strategic stability and what is its current status in the Middle East, and more closely, in Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Theory of nuclear deterrence

In order to understand the essence and aim of nuclear deterrence theory, it is important to look at its theoretical foundations. This theory is a subpart of the realist school of thought in international relations. The classical realist thought considers human nature as the basis of politics and (foreign) policy making. Consequently, it puts much emphasis on the role of leaders and politicians and less on the international system or the role of power (Lebow, 2013). Structural realism or neorealism, on the other hand, place the emphasis on rationality and the structure of the international system. They argue that the international setting is inherently anarchic thus there is no higher authority that could monitor or influence the sovereign states. The lack of control or higher authority implies that there is no guarantee that a state will not be attacked by another. Therefore, it is in a state's best interest to increase its power (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). To what extent said power should be increased divides the neorealist school. Offensive realists, like Mearsheimer himself, argue that a state's power should be extended to the fullest and aim for hegemony. Defensive realists, like Waltz, argue that power maximization and seeking hegemony is unwise as if a state amasses too much power, the system will punish it (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). Nevertheless, in neorealism, balancing is essential to avoid conflict, in other words, deterrence is desirable but it is only obtainable by power. Mearsheimer identifies balance of power as a "function of tangible military assets (…) such as nuclear weapons" (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 78). Defensive realists, like Waltz, argue that balancing will occur when a state obtains too much power and thereby threatens the other states, which will increase their need for power too thus creating an arms race. Hence, it is imperative to keep military power at approximately the same level. This is what Waltz calls "appropriate amount of power" (Mearsheimer J. , 2013, p. 81). As nuclear weapons are the most destructive and powerful weapons, it can be understood why they play in essential role of neorealists thinking.

Having explained how nuclear weapons fit in the neorealist school of thought, nuclear deterrence theory itself ought to be introduced. The first, and likely most known, theory, or more like an instance, of nuclear deterrence is the so-called mutually assured destruction, MAD, which came to prominence during the early stages of the Cold War. What MAD encompasses that if a country, say the USSR, was to strike another country with nuclear weapons, say the U.S., then a full-scale nuclear war would annihilate both the attacker and

the attacked. Thus, the rational fear from being obliterated deters countries from using nuclear weapons. Or at least this was the case during the Cold War between the USSR and the U.S. (Walton, 2016). MAD is closely associated with the Cold War and it is more a reality on its own than a theory, therefore it is important to turn to elaborations on nuclear deterrence theory itself.

The main proponent of nuclear deterrence by proliferation is Kenneth Waltz. He claims that "the presence of nuclear weapons makes wars less likely" (Waltz(a), 1981, p. 52). He provides a number of reasons why this would the case. One is history. Since the end of the Second World War there had been no major wars, and especially there were no wars between two states, which both possessed nuclear weapons. Waltz went as far as to claim that nuclear weapons were a "force working for peace" as they have discouraged main powers to go to war with each other (Waltz(a), 1981, p. 7). The reason for such discouragement is that nuclear states are aware how much irreversible damage nuclear strikes can cause not only to them but to humanity as a whole. In Waltz's understanding there is no victory in nuclear war as both the attacker and the attacked are doomed to be annihilated. Therefore, he states that "deterrence works because nuclear weapons enable one state to punish another state severely without defeating it" (Waltz(a), 1981, p. 53). Consequently, one part of Waltz's explanation as to why nuclear deterrence works is that nuclear states are well aware of destruction nuclear wars bring about and they are not willing to risk this. The second part of Waltz's explanation, is the proposed thesis that nuclear weapons make wars less likely. This assumption does not only originate from the historical fact that there have been no major wars after the Second World War but also from the balance of power among nuclear states. Waltz explains states acquire nuclear primarily for self-defense. If a great power obtains nuclear weapons it is attributed to the fact that its great power adversary had already obtained them. This was the case with the USSR when they launched their nuclear program. If a country does not have a nuclear ally or it fears that its nuclear ally will not retaliate then it pushes that country to acquire nuclear weapons for their own safety. In other cases, like Israel, when a country fears the conventional weaponry of its adversaries, it may opt to launch a nuclear program to counter the larger and stronger conventional armies of its foes (Waltz(a), 1981). Therefore, fear and the desire to be at least as strong as the enemy drive states to acquire nuclear weapons. Having acquired such weaponry, these states can feel safer for two

reasons. One, they know fatal consequences of using nuclear weapons both as the attacker and the attacked. Two, if two hostile enemies build up a nuclear arsenal, there will be less fear and despair in the one that did not use to have nuclear weapons.

In accordance with Waltz's thesis is Tertrais's (2011) findings. He is a strong proponent of nuclear deterrence and his report to the French Atomic Energy Commission, he presents why deterrence works. He outlines that no major war has taken place since 1945, there have been no wars between two nuclear powers and no country with a nuclear arsenal has been invaded (Tertrais, 2011). He furthers his argument that nuclear deterrence is the most likely explanation of the relative peacefulness since 1945 and not globalization, democratization or integration. He maintains that nuclear deterrence is still very relevant as the bipolarity that characterized the Cold War is over and it is the age of multipolarity with many nuclear states. Some of these new nuclear states are bitter enemies and therefore nuclear deterrence could play a crucial in preventing conflicts.

Knopf (2010) emphasizes that the nuclear world has changed significantly since the end of the Cold War. Nowadays, rogue regimes and terrorist groups may be in possession of nuclear weapons. Here the emphasis is on rogue regimes, such as North Korea or Iran in Knopf's view, which if manage to acquire nuclear weapons may pose a grave threat to regional and international security. Knopf also underlines that history shows that nuclear deterrence is possible, although it may not be a safe guarantee but "deterrence is not as unreliable as sceptics imply" (Knopf, 2010, p. 7).

As states realize the deterrence value of nuclear weapons, proliferation increases. Here it is important to distinguish between two types of proliferation, horizontal and vertical. Vertical proliferation means that there is an increase in the number of nuclear warheads possessed by nuclear states. Walton (2016) finds that there is vertical non-proliferation, which means that the absolute number of warheads is decreasing. However, there is an ongoing horizontal proliferation, which means that number of states that have or aspire to have nuclear weapons is on the rise.

In accordance with Tertrais, Knopf and Walton's arguments is Sidhu's findings. Sidhu (2013) explains that nuclear non-proliferation faces many challenges in the 21st century, primarily for two reasons. One, as the Cold War ended the bipolar world ceased to be and moved to a more multipolar system, at least in context of nuclear weapons. Even though, some states chose to

disarm, some states chose to proliferate such North Korea and Iran. Those states that have recently become nuclear have no desire to disarm. Two, the new nuclear states chose proliferation for security and deterrence reasons and they feel that nuclear weapons are their guarantors of safety (Sidhu, 2013).

As the main theme of the study is nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, it is essential to briefly touch upon the dynamics of nuclear proliferation and deterrence in that region. Riedel and Samore (2008) explain that currently in the Middle East Israel has the nuclear hegemony because Pakistan needs its arsenal to deter India. The other Middle Eastern states have not been successful to develop their own arsenal, or in cases of Iraq and Syria, Israel simply destroyed their facilities. Therefore, Israel has a hegemony of nuclear weapons in the region, but with Iran's own nuclear program the situation may change. However, the perceived existential threat from an Iranian nuclear weapon is so high in Israel that they may interfere. The US and the Gulf states are not happy with Iran's proliferation either and feel threatened by Iran's desire for nuclear power. Hence, it may be possible that one of the Gulf states, likely Saudi Arabia, build or purchases nuclear weapons for their own safety. Therefore, nuclear proliferation is becoming a more difficult issue as all states desiring nuclear weapons gives safety as their reason to build them (Riedel & Samore, 2008).

As a final aspect of the nuclear deterrence theory, it is important to examine the so-called stability-instability paradox. This paradox was identified at the early stages of the Cold War by prominent historian Liddell Hart. It essentially about the fact that two nuclear powers would not go into direct war with each other fearing of mutually assured destruction but they would engage in more proxy wars or limited wars (Krepon, 2004). The reality of this paradox can be seen throughout the Cold War where the USSR and the U.S. never engaged in direct confrontation but in a number of proxy wars. In case of the present day Middle East it can be noticed in Israel and Iran's involvement in the Syrian conflict, or Iran and Saudi Arabia's proxy war in Yemen.

Overall, the essence of the nuclear deterrence theory is the aggregate of three main components. First, it is a part of the neorealist school, which maintains that power is essential for a state's survival as there is no other guarantee for its safety than itself. Whether such power ought to be maximized and hegemony is to be sought is a matter of the offensive-

defensive realist divide but balance of power is crucial to avoid fear and breakout of conflicts (Mearsheimer J. , 2013).

Second, history shows that nuclear deterrence has actually worked in a sense that there has not yet been a nuclear war, and states with nuclear arsenal are unlikely to be attacked (Tertrais, 2011). Third, nuclear states are aware of the destruction nuclear wars bring about and that there are no winners in such wars and this refrains them to directly confront one another (Bluth, 2010). Finally, nuclear deterrence itself is a strategy for safety and stability that guarantees the survival of a state (Waltz(b), 2012).

As nuclear proliferation is a prerequisite for strategic stability, it is essential to look at counterarguments against nuclear proliferation as thus far the study has been arguing for proliferation. There are a number of reasons why nuclear proliferation is problematic. First of all, proliferation increase the likelihood of nuclear accidents, which are devastating (Long, 2013). Second, it can increase the "unauthorized use of nuclear weapons" if more and more adversary countries acquire the weapons, which do not have advanced command and control systems (Long, 2013, p. 385). Strategic stability achieved by nuclear proliferation can lead to the so-called stability/instability paradox. Therefore, nuclear proliferation can increase the frequency of conventional confrontations, proxy and limited wars (Bluth, 2010). Another serious consequence of nuclear proliferation is that nuclear weapons may be transferred to terrorists (Sidhu, 2013). One such instance could be that Iran gives nuclear warheads to Hezbollah to attack Israel. Nonetheless, Tertrais (2011), Waltz (2012) and Long (2013) long argue that when a country obtains nuclear weapons it will be more careful and not foolish to transfer its nuclear arsenal as it may be held responsible for the actions of the terrorist group. The transferred nukes may well be used against the country that gave it to the terrorists (Waltz(b), 2012). What may be more worrying is that not so stable states, like Pakistan, is unable to properly guard its arsenal and the terrorists simply plunder the nuclear arsenal or infiltrate the facilities (Sidhu, 2013).

Podvig (2012) argues that strategic stability is nothing but a myth, which is used to justify nuclear armament. He argues that the concept itself that mutually assured destruction creates some form of stability as no-one would advocate nuclear instability. Yet, the its defining characteristics are inherently vague. He contends that the numbers and percentages used to justify the efficiency of a second strike is completely arbitrary and therefore cannot be used

as base to build stability on (Podvig, 2012). Podvig states that a strike with only one nuclear weapon can bring about catastrophic consequences, therefore it is unnecessary to talk about the number of warheads delivered during the first or second strike. Further, Podvig argues that weapon system can be used as effective deterrence because stability depends more on the political atmosphere than on the presence and number of nuclear warheads. He concludes that strategic stability may be a theory and may work at a theoretical level. However, in real life it is diplomatic and political decisions that define a situation. If a state wants to go to war then it will, if a state wants to be deterred then it will choose not to engage in conflicts. It is eventually politics that decides and not theories. As Podvig (2012) puts it "even the most difficult strategic stability problems are usually resolved by a simple decision that they are not problems anymore". Consequently, regardless of how many experts argue for the relevance, applicability and usefulness of strategic stability, it may just be a theory that may guide decisions but in real life it can be overwritten with a simple decision.

Strategic stability

Strategic stability, just like most concepts and theories of nuclear weapons and proliferation, is an idea inherited from the Cold War (Colby, 2013). As it has already been argued, strategic stability is the outcome of effective nuclear deterrence, understood in the terms not carrying out a nuclear strike against another nuclear power. Even though most definitions tend to touch on similar encompassing factors, there are nevertheless differences in what factors or features constitute for strategic stability (Colby, 2013).

First, it is essential to look at how Thomas Schelling, who coined the term strategic stability, defined the term. In his view, for effective deterrence roughly equal-sized nuclear arsenal was not enough. Nuclear states had to have "credible and survivable second-strike capability" (Garcia, 2017, p. 355). Second strike in nuclear deterrence theory refers to one state's ability to equally respond to nuclear strike with another nuclear strike. For effective nuclear deterrence, second-strike capability is a must, and the fact that by a second strike the attacker can also be annihilated is the base of mutually assured destruction (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). Writing still during the Cold War, Steinbruner (1978) puts less emphasis on theorizing, instead he sees the reality of strategic stability in the actual physical power of a state and sheer number of nuclear weapons. He nevertheless accepts the theoretical implications that

strategic stability is the outcome of nuclear deterrence based on the fear from mutually assured destruction. Yet, he reiterates the importance of physical parameters, in other words components and effectivity military power, which impact the vulnerability and second-strike, or retaliatory, capacity of a nuclear state. These parameters are "the number of strategic launchers, the number of independently targetable warheads they carry, the yield of the warheads, the accuracy of the delivery systems, the certainty with which the location of targets can be determined, and the resistance of these targets to damage from the effects of nuclear explosion" (Steinbruner, 1978, p. 414). Steinbruner's indicators of physical parameters that are needed for effective deterrence and thereby achieving and maintaining strategic stability are valuable, however a few things need to be noted. First, Steinbruner writes in 1978 and in context of the U.S.-USSR Cold War therefore he puts much emphasis on the physical capabilities of the two states, as both had thousands or warheads, advanced delivery systems and endless targets. Second, these physical parameters do not fully apply to the case of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has no nukes or nuclear facilities therefore none of the physical parameters identified by Steinbruner apply to it. Iran does have accurate missiles that could carry nuclear warheads but they do not yet possess nuclear weapons. The comparison of physical parameters will be appropriate when Iran reaches the level of Israel nuclear capabilities, which has a nuclear triad system. Nonetheless, Steinbruner's indicators could be very useful if Iran reaches the level of Israel's nuclear capacity. Steinbruner also assesses the conditions necessary for stability. "The fundamental conditions of stability are believed to exist (a) if each side under all reasonable circumstances could be expected to destroy in retaliation from an attack some 30-50% of the opponent's population and 50-70% of the opponent's industrial structure and (b) if this expectation is firmly established throughout the world" (Steinbruner, 1978, p. 414). Point (a) is self-explanatory but point (b) is interesting as Steinbruner points out stability can only be achieved if nuclear countries recognize how much a retaliatory strike needs to destroy to avoid a first strike. Even though, Steinbruner was writing in context of the Cold War and his indicators mainly pertain to the U.S. and the USSR but the condition for strategic stability may be very relevant if Iran goes nuclear.

A more recent definition is provided by Bluth (2010). He states that "strategic stability means that the balance of forces between the two states is such that nuclear deterrence is effective,

and consequently there is little incentive for the initiation of armed conflict" (Bluth, 2010, p. 389). There are three takeaways from his definition, balance of power, effective deterrence and little incentive to start a war. As it was stated earlier, definitions of strategic stability differ but they all tend to have similar identifiable aspects. Bluth (2010) addresses the importance of balance. Balance of power is not only an inherent part neorealism but of nuclear deterrence as well. Without equal nuclear capacity, deterrence may well be insufficient as the stronger nuclear power might choose to strike knowing that the second strike may not be as destructive as the opponent's nuclear capacity is weaker. This a precondition for effective deterrence that the two adversaries are roughly at the same level in nuclear capacity. If there is equal capability for second strike then the incentive to engage in a nuclear conflict should be close to zero as there could be mutually assured destruction.

Another definition is provided by Colby (2013), which conceptualizes the theory in a rather different way. According to him, "strategic stability should be understood to mean a situation in which no party has an incentive to use nuclear weapons save for vindication of its vital interests in extreme circumstances" (Colby, 2013, p. 55). Colby's definition may seem vague or confusing, but as he argues it is hard to define strategic stability given the ever-changing nature of international politics. By vindication, he means that a country should one use its nuclear arsenal when it has been hit first by nuclear weapons or it sees its vital interest in grave danger. Extreme circumstances also refer to the scenario when there is no alternative given the nature of the attack occurred on that country but the use of nuclear weapons (Colby, 2013).

Overall, strategic stability encompasses a great variety of factors that are needed for its reality. As the literature review has shown, strategic stability is an outcome, or at least desired outcome, of nuclear deterrence (Bluth, 2010). Generally, the concept of strategic stability can be summed up as following. The two adversaries need to be equal strong in terms of nuclear arms and in terms of second-strike capability (Steinbruner, 1978). This way mutually assured destruction is ensured and consequently both the attacker and the attacked would be annihilated should a nuclear strike take place (Podvig, 2012). Thus, there has to be a clear balance of power. Balance of power then should lead to effective deterrence where both parties are aware of each other's strength and of destruction a nuclear war between them could bring about (Waltz(a), 1981). Finally, effective deterrence should lead to stability

because there is no or very little incentive to engage in a nuclear war because it would end with the destruction of both parties (Colby, 2013).

As it was mentioned earlier, the so-called stability/instability paradox can be an outcome of strategic stability whereby two nuclear adversary countries do not engage in direct confrontation but in limited or proxy wars (Krepon, 2004). Hence, it is called a paradox because there is strategic stability meaning that there would be no full-scale nuclear war but the absolute number of conflicts worldwide that involves the antagonizing countries may not decrease but rather increase (Bluth, 2010).

Finally, it is important to note that nuclear proliferation does not always lead to strategic stability as the aforementioned scholars, primarily Kenneth Waltz, proposes. Long (2013) argues that strategic stability depends on the context. In some instances, like the Cold War, nuclear proliferation did lead to strategic stability. However, in other cases nuclear proliferation can cause more instability, therefore the context in which strategic stability is analyzed is crucial. If context is to be considered as an inherent and relevant part of strategic stability, then the type of proliferation and the actors involved need to be evaluated (Long, 2013). The types of proliferation and the role and nature of the different actors with regards to strategic stability will be part of the upcoming analysis.

The role of perceived threat

Fear in international relations is the outcome of the imbalance of power as neorealists argue (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). Countries feel threatened when they perceive their enemies stronger or having offensive intentions. If a country perceives that its strength is no match to its adversary that creates fear (Tertrais, 2011). Therefore, in neorealist thinking, the balance of power is quintessential (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). An upset in the balance of power leads to fear whereby the threatened party feels the urge to start arming itself (Waltz(a), 1981). That is why, as Bluth puts it, “deterrence is essentially a psychological phenomenon” whereby the deterrence is driven by the perceived threat one country may pose to another (Bluth, 2010, p. 389). The more threatened a country feels the more it will want to deter by arming itself, at times with nuclear weapons. What is problematic in such scenarios that the threatened party arms itself too much that it will become more powerful than its adversary, which consequently upsets the balance of power again. This may lead to a never-ending circle of

arms race (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). That is why Waltz talks about that there is such thing as enough power so that two parties are able to effectively deter each other but there will be no arms race (Waltz(a), 1981).

Fear and perceived threat from India played a decisive role in Pakistan's nuclear program. They could not defeat India in conventional wars, they saw that India had developed its own nuclear arsenal and therefore they felt threatened by India and hence they began their own nuclear program (Quinlan, 2005). Fear also played a decisive role in Israel's nuclear program as they were afraid that the surrounding Arab states could eventually defeat Israel by conventional means. Thus, Israel needed something that could effectively deter the Arab states from attacking it (NTI(a), 2014). Such can be the case of Iran, which perceives a threat from Israel, given that Israel destroyed the nuclear reactor of Iraq in 1981 and of Syria in 2007, fearing that they would build nuclear weapons (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Thus, Iran can perceive Israel as a threat as Israel may strike Iran's facilities first, therefore for effective deterrence, Iran has to have a second-strike capability. Fear could drive Saudi Arabia to acquire nuclear weapons as it feels that Iran threatens its safety, vital interests and role in the region (Kissinger, 2014). Therefore, fear and perceived threat from others is arguably the greatest drive behind deterrence, for effective deterrence in some cases nuclear proliferation is needed. Thus, there is a clear link between fear, threat and nuclear proliferation however perceived or real the first two may be (Waltz(b), 2012).

Why Iran should get the bomb

This subsection of the literature review serves two purposes. One, it is a comprehensive review of Waltz's article "Why Iran should get the bomb" which is an essential part of this study as Waltz is the most prominent proponent of nuclear proliferation and deterrence (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). Consequently, this study utilizes much of his work, thus a detailed review is needed. Second, as Iran is the most likely to next proliferate in the Middle East, it is imperative to look at the implications of an Iranian nuclear arsenal found in current literature (Erickson, 2016).

As it was already shown, Iran's ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons originated from the necessity or desire to deter Saddam's Iraq (NTI(b), 2018). Up to the early 1990s, Iran and Israel maintained a kind of normal relationship where they did not view each other as enemies, in

other words, there was no perceived threat from one another. The main reason for this was that they both viewed Saddam's Iraq as their main enemy, and this perception had brought Israel and Iran closer (Parsi, 2007). This was to fundamentally change. With the collapse of the USSR and Saddam's defeat, a power vacuum was forming and both Israel and Iran felt that their time had come to fill such vacuum and become the hegemon in the region. The strategic alliance that Israel and Iran once had soon turned into rivalry (Parsi, 2007). There was one another issue that worsened the rivalry, Israel was visibly stronger because it had produced nuclear weapons (Chubin, 1995). Thus, there were the new rivals in the region that could strive for hegemony but one was evidently stronger. Therefore, following the neorealist thought, there was no balance of power as Israel would have been able to strike Iran with nuclear weapons at any point when it felt that its vital interests were at stake. Iran, having no second-strike capability, saw Israel as a growing threat as Israel's anti-Iran rhetoric and intentions were rather vocal (Parsi, 2007). This drove Iran speed up its nuclear program in the second half of the 1990s (NTI(b), 2018).

The most important peace on Iran's nuclear proliferation is by Waltz, who outlines why Iran should go nuclear. Waltz (2012) begins his analysis by stating there is no balance of power in the Middle East as Israel seems to be the hegemon even if it does not pose itself as so, yet it is the only power that has a nuclear arsenal and hence it is the strongest power in the region. As Iran's nuclear program was exposed in the early 2000s and there had been numerous diplomatic affairs to stop or to place checks on this program. Such efforts were not successful and Iran continued its enrichment program (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Waltz (2012) argues that diplomatic efforts are generally ineffective because if a state is determined to go nuclear then it will. The same applies for sanctions as they are also quite unlikely to discourage a state from going nuclear. Waltz then provides a number of reasons why a nuclear Iran is not as scary as it could be believed and that why it is better for stability in the Middle East.

First, Waltz argues that the Iranian leadership is not irrational. They are aware of the fact that once they go nuclear they will be a target of the major powers. They are also not suicidal so they understand that they were strike, say Israel, then they would be annihilated by a second strike. Thus, the fear that Israel and the U.S. hold that a nuclear Iran would pose the greatest threat is unfounded in Waltz's view (Waltz(b), 2012). Iran sees nuclear weapons as guarantor for its safety because both the U.S. and Israel could attack Iran if they seem fit and Iran would

have no chance of winning or even surviving. Thus, nuclear weapons guarantee Iran's safety and do not create an existential threat to Israel because eventually, Iran's leaders are rational and they know that if they were to strike first then they would be annihilated (Waltz(b), 2012). Second, in Waltz's view "power begs to be balanced" (Waltz(b), 2012, p. 2). As he states there is no power balance in the Middle East as Israel is the only one with nuclear weapons. Therefore, a nuclear Iran could deter a nuclear Israel and thereby make the Middle East a more stable region. Waltz explains that the Middle East is instable because Israel is the strongest power and this creates fear in other states, and most of these states are hostile towards Israel. Thus, a nuclear Iran could keep Israel in check, and Israel could keep a nuclear Iran check given their mutual nuclear deterrence (Waltz(b), 2012). The role of history is also in the favor of Iran's nuclear program as so far there has never been a nuclear war or a full-scale conventional war between two nuclear states. Hence, Waltz argues that a war would not occur between Iran and Israel as they would deter each other even if Iran's arsenal is much smaller than that of Israel (Waltz(b), 2012). Further, Waltz argues that if Iran goes nuclear, it is unlikely that other countries would follow and that will stabilize the region because there are two adversary nuclear powers that keep each other in check by deterrence (Waltz(b), 2012). He concludes, referring back to his piece in 1981, that "when it comes to nuclear weapons, now as ever, more may be better" (Waltz(b), 2012, p. 5).

Waltz wrote this essay in 2012 and he argued in it that if Iran goes nuclear then other countries will not follow. However, in 2018, the situation is different because of recent events Waltz could not have been aware of in 2012. The recent cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia complicates the situation, as Saudi Arabia may opt for nuclear proliferation if Iran produces a nuclear weapon (Gaouette, 2018). This is something Waltz could not have foreseen.

Nuclear deterrence at working – Case of India and Pakistan

The rationale behind including the case of India and Pakistan is that this example can serve as not only a base for comparison for the other three cases but also as guidelines for nuclear deterrence. The comparison as of now may well be hypothetical as only Israel possesses nuclear weapons, but if Iran manages to proliferate then this case study becomes more relevant and thus can be used to judge the nature and outcomes of nuclear deterrence between Israel and Iran. If Saudi Arabia also chooses to proliferate that will create a

deterrence triangle and consequently the India-Pakistan case may not be relevant anymore to such scenario. Further, the nature of the conflict between India and Pakistan is much different from that of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, this case study is still valuable as it shows nuclear deterrence between two regional powers in a non-Cold War context.

As advocates of nuclear deterrence argue that nuclear proliferation effectively prevents conflicts between nuclear states, it is important to look in to empirical realities to see whether nuclear deterrence works in real life (Bluth, 2010). Arguably, the most-fitting case study could be the Cold War between the USSR and the U.S., which never went into direct war with each other fearing of mutually assured destruction (Walton, 2016). However, the Cold War ended almost 30 years ago and the international situation is much different nowadays. Also, both the USSR and the U.S. were superpowers with massive arsenals whereas Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia are regional powers with small (future) nuclear stockpile. Consequently, the only case of real-life nuclear deterrence that can be compared to the situation among these three countries is that of the nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan (Bluth, 2010). India and Pakistan have been adversaries for decades, they both attempt to be regional powers and they have a relative small nuclear stockpile (Knopf, 2010).

India and Pakistan have long history of conflicts. The first war took place in 1947-1948 after Pakistan acquired statehood. There have been between 9 to 11 interstate crises between the countries, and 4 escalated into war. Between 1947 and 1948, 1965, 1971 and in 1999, but this one had very low intensity of armed clashes (Bluth, 2010). The wars of 1947-1948, 1965 and 1971 were wars fought by conventional armies and claimed high casualties. India has been able to produce nuclear weapons since 1974, and Pakistan obtained its arsenal sometimes in the mid-1980s (Bluth, 2010). Since 1971, no major clash has taken place between them besides the series of skirmishes in 1999. The belonging of the region of Kashmir and Pakistan's perceived fear of India's superiority caused the major wars, yet these factors are still present but no war has taken place for a long time. Bluth (2010) explains that this is the outcome of nuclear deterrence, which is the official policy of both countries and the reason why they have built up nuclear arsenals. Waltz (1981) was already arguing for Pakistan's nuclear armament after India had obtained its arsenal for two reasons. That it was better for Pakistan's self-defense and standing in the region, and that a conventional arms race with India would ruin

Pakistan (Waltz(a), 1981). Tertrais (2011) explains that there have been no wars between India and Pakistan since both of them acquired nuclear weapons. He further explains that there have been many crises where India responded by entering Pakistan with military forces like in 1965 and 1971. However, in 1990, 1999, 2002 and 2008 India did not invade Pakistan as had done so before as response to similar crises (Tertrais, 2011). This seems to support the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence where two nuclear states refrain from engaging in direct combat fearing of mutually assured destruction. As each side "possesses nuclear capability sufficient for credible deterrent" a war between them is extremely unlikely (Quinlan, 2005). As Bluth puts it "nuclear weapons are believed to be more effective in deterring conflict because of their enormous destructive power, the reduced uncertainty about the consequences of a nuclear war and the difficulty in defending against nuclear attack" (Bluth, 2010, p. 390). The case study of India and Pakistan indicates that nuclear deterrence can indeed be effective as these two countries that had engaged in brutal wars before refrain from direct clashes since both possess nuclear weapons. The comparability of the India-Pakistan case to the Israel-Iran case lies in the fact that "these two states are the only small regional nuclear powers that have comparable nuclear arsenals and that are locked in an enduring conflict" (Bluth, 2010, p. 393).

According to scholars, the stability/instability paradox is an inherent part of nuclear deterrence (Krepon, 2004). Consequently, if this paradox was to hold true then there should be more limited and proxy wars between India and Pakistan. Nevertheless, besides the very limited clashes in 1999, no other armed confrontation or proxy war have taken place between India and Pakistan (Bluth, 2010). The stability/instability paradox was very much a reality during the Cold War as part of the nuclear deterrence between the USSR and the U.S. but it cannot be identified at a regional level such as the instance of India and Pakistan (Knopf, 2010). If there is nuclear deterrence to take place among Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia and whether such paradox is to arise is a matter of the analysis. However, it may already be argued that stability/instability paradox may be more visible in this case as these countries have already been engaged in proxy wars and nuclear proliferation may not reduce the frequency of such conflicts (Kissinger, 2014).

Theoretical framework

The literature review has shown that there are multiple approaches to and reasons for nuclear proliferation. The importance of nuclear proliferation is that it can be a result of power balancing following the neorealist school of thought. Consequently, its applicability to this study lies in the fact, as the literature review has shown, that there is no balance of power between Israel and Iran, and there will not be balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia if the former proliferates. Therefore, an understanding of the neorealist balance of power theory and how nuclear proliferation is related to this theory is essential to see how it may be applied to the cases. Further, the review has also revealed that the conceptualization of strategic stability is not an easy task as there are multiple approaches as to what factors contribute to this kind of stability. Nevertheless, the review has indicated that strategic stability is achieved by nuclear deterrence and showed how nuclear deterrence can work in theory and in real life such as in the case of India and Pakistan. However, the shortcomings of strategic stability are valuable for this study as they indicate where and how strategic stability may fail to be achieved.

The gaps in the literature pertain to two aspects. First, only one piece deals explicitly with the question of strategic stability in the Middle East (Long, 2013). The other pieces of literature just touch upon this issue or take different angles that only help understanding part of the case. Second, the academic literature reviewed in this study have been written before 2018 when major developments took place. The cancellation of the Iran nuclear deal may bring about nuclear proliferation, and its implications have been discussed in the literature but not given the current climate. The current situation in the Middle East is also something that the literature missing, and that is the situation of Saudi Arabia. Waltz (2012) argued no country would follow Iran in acquiring nuclear weapons so there would be no arms race. Riedel and Samore (2008) and Kissinger (2014) indicated that Saudi Arabia would likely start its own program as a response to Iranian proliferation. Long (2013) also stated that a Saudi proliferation would be likely in case of an Iranian one but he argued that it would also be problematic to Israel. What neither of the aforementioned authors could have foreseen is the improving ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia therefore it is crucial to look at this relationship and evaluate the scenarios of proliferation from this new perspective as well.

Consequently, the analysis will apply the theories of nuclear proliferation, deterrence and strategic stability to cases of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The proposed model of deterrence among these three, or rather between Iran and an allied Israel and Saudi Arabia, will be compared to that of India and Pakistan to see whether there are similarities and valuable implications of comparison. It is also essential to reflect on the current situation of 2018 in the region and to see what implications or changes it might have for strategic stability.

Strategic stability in the Middle East

If characteristics of strategic stability identified by academic literature is taken into account then there is no such stability in the Middle East. The reason why for this lack of strategic stability can be found in Israel's hegemonic position as it is currently the only country that possesses nuclear weapons (Waltz(b), 2012). Israel maintains nuclear ambiguity or opacity whereby it does not disclose the fact that it has nuclear weapons but lets it be known as an open secret (NTI(a), 2014). Such ambiguity is a well-design strategy for Israel as its enemies do not dare attacking fearing that it might strike back nuclear weapons. Going openly nuclear would change this status, which may not be as beneficial as opacity (Long, 2013). Nevertheless, it is taken for granted that Israel has nuclear weapons, which it can use at any moment given its nuclear triad (Bluth, 2010). Further, Israel established the so-called Begin doctrine, named after PM Menachem Begin, whereby Israel would carry out a preventive strike on any of its enemies, which are believed to be producing weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons (Parsi, 2007). The so-called Begin doctrine was the drive behind the destruction of Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981, and the destruction of a suspected Syrian reactor in 2007 (Riedel & Samore, 2008). When the Israel-Iran antagonism began in the early 1990s, a possible strike on Iran's nuclear facilities were discussed within the Israeli military circles, even though then the Iranian nuclear program was just a dream (Chubin, 1995). Israel is likely to continue the Begin doctrine as recently PM Netanyahu stated that Israel "will never allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons" (Wootliff, 2018). What is also important with regards to an Israeli response to Iran's proliferation is what form the Iranian nuclear arsenal will take. If their program remains hedged so there are tests and weapons produced then Israel can stay at nuclear ambiguity as there will no actual weapons to deter. However, if Iran's arsenal is tested and deployed then the Israelis will have to respond accordingly. This may mean that

they have to give their policy of nuclear opacity and acknowledge that they indeed have a large nuclear arsenal (Long, 2013). As Long (2013) argues if Iran's arsenal stays hedged then there will be no reason for Israel to reveal its nuclear capacity. Therefore, the two counties can live in a "strategically stable balance of mutual opacity" (Long, 2013, p. 405). Further, then Israel would feel no pressure to carry out a first or preventive strike while Iran could still maintain the capacity to produce and deploy a nuclear weapon in case of necessity. Nevertheless, if Iran does nuclear testing and deploys its arsenal then Israel has to testing and deploying to show that is prepared for confrontation (Long, 2013). Long's insight into the different types of proliferation is valuable as it reveals, unlike other literature presented before, that strategic stability depends on the context as well. When examining strategic stability in the context of the historical era, the actors involved and they type of possible proliferation need to be taken into account because they greatly influence whether strategic stability is attainable (Long, 2013).

Achieving strategic stability in the Middle East from an Israeli perspective seems rather unlikely. Israel is very unlikely to accept a nuclear Iran, and as history shows, it may choose to strike Iran's facilities like it did with that of Iraq and Syria (Riedel & Samore, 2008). Israel has so far effectively use its nuclear opacity to deter its enemies, which nevertheless only have conventional forces. Iran could be Israel's first nuclear adversary but Israel is likely unwilling to accept mutual nuclear deterrence (NTI(a), 2014). It is understandable from a neorealist perspective that Israel seeks to maximize its power and be the hegemon in the region as that would guarantee its safety the most (Mearsheimer J. , 2013). However, as Waltz, and other proponents of nuclear deterrence argue, Israel's nuclear hegemony has been destabilizing the Middle East for decades (Waltz(b), 2012). As for implications for strategic stability, it seems very unlikely that Israel would give up its role as hegemon and accept a nuclear Iran. Consequently, Israel may be greatest obstacle for strategic stability in the Middle East as it may decide to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. However, such preventive strike can lead a war, which would further destabilize the region.

The main cause of antagonism between Iran and Saudi Arabia lies in the sectarian divide. Saudi Iran poses itself as the leader of Sunni Islam, whereas Iran claims the leadership of the Shia branch. Next to religious differences, the countries have been engaged in a power game as to which is the to be the regional power in the Gulf area (Kissinger, 2014). This has escalated into

a series of proxy wars, the most serious being the current conflict in Yemen. The Saudis support the Sunni Yemeni government whereas Iran supports the Shia rebels. In the Syrian civil war, Iran backs the Assad regime and Saudi Arabia is on the side of the rebels. They have clashing interests in Lebanon where Iran is the main supporter of Hezbollah, and Saudi Arabia assists the Sunnis (al-Rasheed, 2018). Therefore, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been adversaries for quite some time and there are possibly well-grounded fears that such antagonism could lead to war between them (Marcus, 2017). To achieve strategic stability from the Saudi side, Saud Arabia would have to obtain nuclear weapons as a response to Iran's nuclear program. Currently, neither of them possesses nuclear weapons but Iran is much closer to having one than Saudi Arabia. Having only conventional armies, the two may be more inclined to engage in war as the outcome of such wars are a lot less foreseeable than that of nuclear wars (Tertrais, 2011). If Iran decides to proliferate then Saudi Arabia ought to follow as the Saudis perceive Iran as an existential threat not only Israel (Marcus, 2017). If Saudi Arabia does not proliferate and Iran does then there will be no power balance as Iran will ultimately be stronger than Saudi Arabia. The reverse scenario is unlikely, as Saudi Arabia would only proliferate as a response to Iranian nuclear weapons (Gaouette, 2018). Hence, strategic stability from the Saudi perspective only comes into play if Iran decides to acquire nuclear weapons, then as a response the Saudis would have to the same. This way effective nuclear deterrence could be achieved between them leading to strategic stability, or at least it is argued.

The question of Israel in Saudi Arabia is also interesting one. Saudi Arabia sent troops to fight Israel in 1948 and 1973 and has been a supporter of the Palestinian cause (Kissinger, 2014). However, recently Israel and Saudi Arabia are getting closer, mainly due to the mutually perceived threat of Iran (Yaari, 2018). A groundbreaking event recently was that Crown Prince Mohammad stated that the Israelis have their right to their land. Thus, it seems that Israel and Saudi Arabia may be forging an alliance with the primary aim of deterring Iran (Ahren, 2018). Further, it has been rumored due to the cancellation of the Iran deal, and Iran's renewed efforts to excel its nuclear program, Israel may share its nuclear technology with Saudi Arabia (Webb, 2018). Consequently, the issue of strategic stability between Israel and Saudi Arabia seems out of question as Saudi Arabia has lived with a nuclear Israel and recently these two countries can be considered as strategic allies. Nuclear deterrence between Saudi Arabia and

Israel may be relevant if Saudi Arabia ever acquires nuclear weapons and Iran will no longer be perceived as vital enemy. Then, it is a possibility that Saudi-Israeli relationship may get bitter again then strategic stability can be discussed (Long, 2013). Given the current state of affairs between Israel and Saudi Arabia, strategic stability looks off topic. Rather, they should be considered together as a deterrence against Iran when discussing strategic stability in the Middle East.

Strategic stability would be the most important for Iran. Iran, currently having no nuclear weapons feels threatened by Israel's nuclear arsenal and possibly of Saudi Arabia. If Iran was to acquire nuclear weapons, as for example Kenneth Waltz argues, then there would be a balance of power in the region, which could lead to increased stability (Waltz(b), 2012). Effective nuclear deterrence and strategic stability is in Iran's best interest because this way its safety could be guaranteed. However, it is enough for Iran to produce nuclear weapons, it also has to have "credible and survivable" second strike capacity, which guarantees deterrence (Garcia, 2017). If Iran develops nuclear weapons but has no survivable second-strike capacity then deterrence will not work if said weapons are destroyed in a preemptive strike. Therefore, from an Iranian perspective, strategic stability is desirable, however the extent to which is achievable is debated. Israel has stated it is not willing to accept a nuclear Iran therefore the future and possibility of strategic stability in the Middle East are uncertain. What implications does then nuclear proliferation have in the Middle East. As it has been shown, most of the Middle East accepted to live with Israel's nuclear arsenal, however ambiguous it may be. Next issue for Middle Eastern states is whether they are willing to accept another nuclear power, which may be very open about its nuclear capabilities. In Long's (2013) analysis it is argued that in case of an Iranian proliferation, four other Middle Eastern states would aspire to have their own nuclear capability. Turkey being a NATO member is unlikely to start its own nuclear program. Egypt is weak and unstable and allegedly has given up its efforts to be a nuclear power. The United Arab Emirates are a close US-ally and they "signed a nuclear sharing agreement" thus the UAE are unlikely to proliferate (Long, 2013, p. 415). Long in 2013 wrote that Saudi Arabia is the most likely candidate to have its own nuclear arsenal because it has the wealth to quickly develop or purchase nuclear weapons. Events in 2018 indicate that this is likely to be the case if Iran eventually chooses to proliferate. Similarly to the Iran-Israel case, the type of proliferation weighs in a lot between Iran and the Saudis as it can influence

stability. Long argues that hedged proliferation in both countries would be the "most strategically stable environment" given Israel's remains opaque in its nuclear policy (Long, 2013, p. 416). If Iran's nuclear arsenal is recessed then subsequently, Saudi Arabia's arsenal needs to recessed as well. Long (2013) argues that this would be destabilizing as the nuclear forces of these two countries would be similar in terms vulnerability, poor command and control and insufficient early warning. Long's analysis is from 2013 so he could not have foreseen that Saudi Arabia and Israel would be getting closer. He argued that a Saudi proliferation, hedged or recessed, would have negative consequences to Israel, which would have to deal with two adversary nuclear powers, even though Israeli-Saudi relations in 2013 were not as bitter as for instance Israeli-Iranian relations (Long, 2013). Long concluded that a Middle East with recessed capabilities are prone to be very instable, more instable than the Cold War. however, a Middle East with hedged and opaque nuclear capabilities may be quite stable and efficient at deterrence. He also argues that maintaining the capability of an efficient preventive strike stabilizes the region and likely to avoid an actual preventive strike from any of the three parties.

The implications of the Iran Deal

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran (Nuclear) Deal, was agreed upon in 2015 among China, France, Germany, Russia, the EU, the UK, the USA and Iran. The aim of the deal was to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for lifting the economic sanctions that had been imposed for 10 years when Iran's quest for nuclear power was exposed. Supporters of the deal argued that it will keep Iran's nuclear ambitions in check and prevent Iran from producing nuclear weapons even though Iran had stated multiple times that their intentions with regards nuclear weapons are peaceful (BBC, 2018). The details of the deal included that Iran had to reduce its stockpile of enriched uranium by 98 percent. Its previous stock would have been enough to produce eight to ten nuclear weapons. Further, Iran had to redesign its reactor, which could have produced nuclear weapons, in a way that the facility cannot any longer serve the purpose of producing nuclear weapons. Iran's nuclear facilities and laboratories had to be opened for investigation and monitoring as well. Finally, the deal meant that instead of three months, it would take at least a year for Iran to produce a nuclear weapon given its reduced stockpile and redesigned facilities (SkyNews, 2018).

Overall, the Iran Deal was seen as one of the greatest achievement of the Obama administration and it seemed to be effective in preventing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons (BBC, 2018).

President Trump before his election hinted at pulling out of the Iran Deal, which he perceived as bad and dangerous. Trump argued that the deal itself was not effective enough and by lifting the sanctions Iran, allegedly, could continue sponsoring terrorism. However, the main reasons behind the withdrawal is that Trump vowed to dismantle Obama's legacy and the Iran Deal is part of said legacy. Further, this move is seen as a huge favor to Israel, which has been the greatest opponent of the deal. Trump is also set to reimpose the sanctions (McKernan, 2018). One of the main implications of Trump's withdrawal from the deal is that Iran now is free to pursue nuclear weapons. Although several other countries were involved in brokering the deal, it was essentially about Iran and the U.S. Therefore, the removal inspection agencies due to American withdrawal can encourage Iran to restart an offensive nuclear program (Bort, 2018).

The withdrawal of the U.S., the future of the Iran Deal is unstable. Days after Trump pulled out, Iran reinforced its commitments to upholding the deal and continue its nuclear program with limited uranium enrichment and it would let the inspectors stay (Bort, 2018). Leaders of the parties to the deal also stated they value the deal and want to see it continued. Nevertheless, recently Iran seems to move away from the deal. Supreme leader, Khamenei, promised that if the deal was to collapse, Iran would restart enhanced enrichment process, which is capable of producing nuclear weapons (Erickson, 2016). Such promise seems to be manifested in the fact that Iran began to expand its nuclear facility's centrifuge-assembly, which could enrich pure uranium, which is needed for a nuclear weapon. Hence, the future if the deal is uncertain, and it seems that Iran no longer feels obliged to abide the terms of the deal as the U.S. withdrew. Nevertheless, the newly imposed sanctions could harm Iran's economy further, and its renewed offensive nuclear program could alienate other countries who in turn could also seek nuclear weapons (Erickson, 2016).

One fundamental problem with the Iran nuclear deal was that it did not offer any solution to Iran's arguably greatest issue, the threat from other nuclear powers (NTI(b), 2018). The Iran deal was hailed a huge diplomatic achievement but it can be argued that it was sort of blackmail. Iran had to reduce its nuclear proliferation, which could have, in theory, enhanced

its safety, in exchange for lifting the sanctions (BBC, 2018). Moreover, the deal meant that Iran could not pursue nuclear weapons, which it had long wanted to obtain. Hence, the deal provided no solution to overcome Iran's security problem or its perceived threat from Israel (McKernan, 2018). Reducing Iran's stockpile, redesigning its facilities and having to endure constant monitoring meant that Israel would still be the strongest power in the Middle East whose nuclear arsenal would still remain unchecked (Bort, 2018). Therefore, to argue from a neorealist point of view, the deal was bad for the balance of power because Israel would still be stronger than Iran. The fact that the U.S withdrew from the deal can bring about positive developments for nuclear deterrence and consequently strategic stability if the deal is cancelled or slowly dies out. Then Iran would be able to obtain nuclear weapons, which are needed for effective deterrence. Therefore, for strategic stability the end of the Iran deal would be beneficial as Iran could obtain a matching nuclear arsenal and could effectively deter Israel.

Conclusion

As a final thought it is wise to reflect on what the future holds for the Middle East. Midway through 2018, this region seems as tormented as ever with little prospect of peace, harmony or even stability. The different schools of thoughts of international relations aim explain world events and provide implications for the future. Having used the neorealists school of thought, mainly because its certain scholars provide implications for the Middle East, it has been shown that concepts like balance of power and deterrence have a lot to do with the Middle East. The merit of applying neorealism was that it revealed the underlying power dynamics in this region while providing explanations of said dynamics. Currently, there is little balance in the Middle East, and as the neorealists hold, balance of power is imperative for a region's stability. The disappearance of Saddam's Iraq as a regional hegemon left a power vacuum, which has not been fulfilled but left Israel as relatively the strongest power in the region as it possesses nuclear weapons. Therefore, in absolute power terms, Israel is the hegemon, as Pakistan, which culturally is close to the Middle East but geographically is not, needs its arsenal to deter India. Hence, the neorealism states, Israel's hegemony creates fear in other states as they feel threatened by Israel. The main reasons they, especially Iran, feel threatened is that Israel is a nuclear power however ambiguous it remains of its arsenal. Following the neorealist school

of thought, rebalancing is needed. Such rebalancing, as Waltz and others argue, can be achieved by nuclear proliferation. For example, if Iran obtains nuclear weapons that could rebalance power in the region. An Iranian proliferation could lead to effective deterrence of Israel and consequently, strategic stability.

As the literature has shown, nuclear deterrence works or at least so far, has worked. The fear of mutual destruction by first and second strikes is so big that it effectively deters two nuclear powers to use nuclear weapons against each other. Or at least it is argued. However, history has shown that deterrence has so far worked as the U.S. and the USSR never went to war with each other, neither of conventional nor of a nuclear kind. The instance of India and Pakistan also shows that deterrence can work. Before both of them went nuclear, they had fought a series of bloody wars. Nonetheless, once they both obtained nuclear weapons, they have not gone to war with each other ever since. Israel, which is believed to have acquired a small stockpile of nuclear weapons in the mid-1970s, has not been attacked since 1973 by another sovereign state unlike before when it had to fight a series of wars for its survival. Thus, it can be seen that having nuclear weapons guarantees a greater level of safety. It is no wonder that countries desire to have it, especially at places where there is no power balance and stability. Thus, nuclear proliferation can lead to effective nuclear deterrence as it can be seen by the example of India and Pakistan.

This then leads to the issue of strategic stability. Strategic stability is believed to arise when to nuclear powers have no incentive to engage in a conflict with each other because both of them are aware that the outcomes will be catastrophic for both of them. However, for effective nuclear deterrence, second-strike capability needs to be ensured to guarantee that the attacker would suffer the same fate as the attacked. Would then strategic stability be a viable option in the Middle East that would stabilize the region? The answer, as usual, could easily be 'it depends'. What it depends on, however, is crucial. The neorealist idea that power needs to be balanced, and currently there is no power balance in the Middle East thanks to Israel's hegemony, then the answer is yes, strategic stability is a viable option. If Iran chooses to proliferate then it counter Israel's hegemony and deter and thereby creating power balance. Nevertheless, two issues need to be elaborated on, the possibility of a Saudi proliferation and the form Iran's arsenal would take. The Saudis stated that they would seek nuclear weapons if Iran chose to proliferate. This could create a nuclear triangle, which is more

complex and therefore dangerous then bilateral deterrence. However, given the improving Israeli-Saudi relations, the scenario would resemble more of a two-against-one setup. Therefore, Iran would have to face to hostile nuclear powers and consequently, there would no balance of power anymore as the Israeli-Saudi axis would be much more powerful. A Saudi proliferation given the current state of affairs, would not lead to strategic stability but rather to increased power imbalance.

The type of proliferation each country chooses also heavily weighs in the implications for strategic stability. As Long (2013) argued if Iran, and possibly Saudi Arabia, chooses to proliferate yet their arsenals remain hedged then Israel can stay their policy of nuclear opacity. This, in Long's understanding, would evidently increase stability in the region. However, if Israel has to give up its opacity because the Iranian and the Saudi arsenals go recessed then such open policy of nuclear deterrence can create serious problems and consequently lead to further destabilization. Finally, Israel promised that it would not allow the existence of a nuclear Iran. Therefore, it is possible that Israel would do strike Iran's nuclear facilities like it did with Iraq's and Syria's back in the day. Consequently, the prospects of strategic stability in the Middle East seem rather dark. On the theoretical level, as most of the literature argue, nuclear proliferation could be beneficial in the region as it would lead to strategic stability. In the real life, the future of strategic stability depends on many factors. First, strategic stability is not in the best interest of Israel as its hegemonic status would end, and its arch enemy, Iran, would acquire the world's most destructive weapon with which it could pose a vital threat to Israel. Strategic stability is the best interest of Iran however, if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, then its adversary, Saudi Arabia could do so too, and given the recent Saudi ties to Israel, Iran would again be overpowered. Strategic stability could then only work if Israel accepted a nuclear Iran, which is unlikely, and Saudi Arabia would not proliferate as response to the Iranian arsenal, which is again rather unlikely. Therefore, on the theoretical level, strategic stability would be a viable option, at least from a neorealist perspective, as it could rebalance power and lead to effective deterrence and increased stability. However, in real life, achieving strategic stability in the Middle East is very unlikely even though it could stabilize the region. However, it has to be added that strategic stability can lead to the stability/instability paradox. If that is the case, then the number of conflicts would unlikely be lower. There may not be a war between the nuclear powers but they could engage in more proxy wars as strategic

stability does not end enmity it just contains it. Therefore, if strategic stability was to be achieved, it would still not make the Middle East more peaceful as arch enemies would still exist but given their nuclear deterrence capabilities they could not engage in direct confrontation. Rather, they would have to confront each other in proxy wars.

Finally, the reality of strategic stability need to be evaluated. As Podvig (2012) argued strategic stability is a myth, or a theory at most, and it is actual political decisions that decide the fate of a region. If a country wants to wage war, then it will regardless of issues of deterrence or strategic stability. Further, nuclear plants and weapons still pose a grave threat if they are not used. Nuclear disasters cause irreversible damages and claim a high number of casualties. Approaching from this angle, nuclear proliferation is inherently a negative thing as it carries very high security risks. Nuclear weapons in tormented regions like the Middle East can be passed on to or acquired by terrorist groups. Such possibilities present a case against nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

In conclusion, this study has shown the merits and applicability of nuclear deterrence and strategic stability. Proponents of these two argue that they offer a solution to instability in the Middle East. Nevertheless, strategic stability may work very well at a theoretical level and seems much applicable and relevant to the Middle East, however looking at facts, recent developments and the complexity of the region, it is out of the question. Therefore, the grand vision of peace in the Middle East seems as far as ever.

It is important to reflect on the limitations of this study. First, there has been an issue with the number of sources. There is much written on the topic of nuclear proliferation and deterrence but there is already less on strategic stability. Most pieces that deal with nuclear weapons in the Middle East are either historical summaries or do not deal substantially with the possible consequences of nuclear proliferation in the region. There are only a couple of pieces of literature that explicitly deal with the issue of strategic stability in the Middle East but they were written before 2018 when a lot has happened, which influences the issue of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. This is a gap this study aimed to fill by combining existing literature on the topic and incorporating the new developments. The recency of the academic sources, as it has been mentioned already, is another limitation because they do not reflect on the recent events that affect the situation of nuclear weapons and strategic stability in the

Middle East. Finally, sources that are in Hebrew, Persian and Arabic have not been included given obvious language barriers even though they could have proven to be very valuable.

For the closing part it is necessary to elaborate on future implications for a similar research. This study took the approach of strategic stability but possibly another study could be done to examine what consequences could nuclear disarmament bring instead of nuclear armament. That could maybe stabilize the region more than proliferation. Another approach can be that instead taking the neorealist balance of power theory and claim that the source of the conflict is lack of balance, one could look at other origins of the conflict. For example, theories of structuralism or social constructivism may fare better at explaining than neorealism. The neorealists could also revisit their thesis and examine if it is not better if there is one hegemon in the region that could ensure stability with its nuclear superiority. This would be in line with offensive branch of neorealism and not the defensive one that argues for power balance. The proponents of nuclear deterrence could look more at the context rather than the history. History shows that deterrence has so far worked but if the current context may be much different than from the historical ones, and such context is neglected, then deterrence may no longer work. Finally, it would also be wise to reflect on the Iran deal, Trump's decision to withdraw and the latest Israeli-Saudi relations in future times as these developments are quite recent.

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