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The Nuclear Taboo and Non-Western Regional Powers

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The Nuclear Taboo and Non-Western Regional Powers



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India

- India adheres to taboo for both strategic and moral reasons. India views its arsenal as a political instrument, not military.
- India's no first use doctrine reserves nuclear weapons for "last resort" situations.
- India is likely to continue to avoid the use of nuclear weapons for war-fighting, but will use them as instruments of coercion, thus increasing the nuclear danger. This is not outside the traditionally observed bounds of the taboo.



The Agni-III at India's Republic Day Parade in 2008. Photo by Public.Resource.org, used under CC 2.0 license.



Pakistan conducts flight test of Half-IX short-range ballistic missile (Nasr). Photo by Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR).

Pakistan

- For Pakistan, strategic concerns and fear of defeat by Indian conventional forces outweigh moral considerations regarding nuclear weapons.
- Pakistan maintains a doctrine of ambiguity; the primary role of its arsenal, which continues to grow qualitatively and quantitatively, is to offset conventional imbalances vis-à-vis India.
- Pakistan's strategic culture embraces nuclear nationalism and does not dwell on the ethics, morality, or humanitarian consequences of nuclear use.

Iran

- The nuclear taboo appears to have been one of several factors in Iranian decision-making about the acquisition of a nuclear weapon.
 - Ayatollah Khomeini's moral and religious aversion to nuclear weapons likely affected the speed and direction of Iran's program.
 - The Shia religious community was divided over whether the Quran either permitted or prevented the pursuit of these weapons.



Secretary Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif Meet in Vienna to Discuss Implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Photo by U.S. Department of State.

Key Findings

- Familiarity with the "nuclear taboo" is limited, especially in Iran and Pakistan.
- Evidence that a nuclear taboo would constrain use of nuclear weapons is mixed.
 - In Iran and Pakistan, questions about normative constraints on the use of nuclear weapons are not widely debated.
 - Officials believe use is legitimate under specific conditions.
 - Few non-government experts have studied or discussed this issue.



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