

State are still relevant for modern civil-military relations. **JFQ**

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**The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons**

By T.V. Paul

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Why have nuclear weapons not been used since their debut over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945? For some time, this question has occupied the high-minded musings of deterrence theorists and strategists alike. In truth, the question of non-use has so occupied the academy that those who think about its antithesis—use—have come to prominence if for no other reason than their willingness to “think the unthinkable”—an adventure upon which Herman Kahn established his legacy.

In the ongoing effort to explain nuclear non-use, two competing schools of thought have emerged: rational/materialist and normative/ideational. The former rejects the idea of a strict non-use ethic, while the latter espouses a stringent taboo-like prohibition against the use of nuclear weapons based on

social constructs that go beyond rational considerations. T.V. Paul's *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* articulates a highly nuanced and eclectic middle ground between these opposing paradigms. A professor of international relations at Canada's McGill University, Paul argues that non-use can be explained by the emergence of an informal social norm, or tradition, that recognizes both the rational/material arguments against nuclear use and ideational factors such as culture and international norms.

In proposing a tradition-based framework, Paul's book stands out among several recent contributions to the academic literature on the topic. In *The Nuclear Taboo* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), Nina Tannenwald's argument falls squarely in the constructivist paradigm. While not entirely dismissive of material factors, “she provides very little, if any, discussion of what material factors contribute to the creation and persistence of the taboo-like prohibition,” as Paul points out. In contrast to Tannenwald, Paul attempts to firmly delineate linkages between material and ideational factors, rather than offer a cursory acknowledgment of the interplay between the two. Other current contributions serve as valuable complements to Paul's argument. Maria Rost Rubble's *Nonproliferation Norms: Why States Choose Nuclear Restraint* (University of Georgia Press, 2009) addresses the question of why states with the motive, means, and opportunity to produce nuclear weapons choose not to—a sort of non-acquisition tradition. On the other end of the spectrum, Mark Fitzpatrick's recent *Institut Français des Relations Internationales* Proliferation Paper *The World After: Proliferation, Deterrence, and Disarmament if the Nuclear Taboo is Broken* considers the impact of violating that prohibition.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is Paul's thorough parsing of the word *tradition* in contrast to other non-use terminology such as *taboo*. Such attention to semantics and clear delineation of the precise implications of a particular term is uncommon but nonetheless important. The greater debate over nuclear policy has suffered immensely from such a lack of specificity. For example, scare-tacticians frequently refer to the U.S. arsenal as being on “hair-trigger” alert. Though intended to conjure up images of Strangelovian madmen with a blinking red button under their finger, the operational reality is in fact much different. Regrettably, Paul's specificity is applied incompletely. Though the implications of *tradition* are clearly understood and delineated, one could argue that it may be equally important to parse the term *use*. Indeed, many rationalist strategists, in rejecting the idea of a non-use taboo, would assert that U.S. nuclear weapons are used every day for deterrence and assurance.

As Paul writes in chapter 9, “There is also the question about how deeply ingrained the tradition is among new nuclear states as well as the aspiring ones.” A weakness of the book is that Paul dedicates only one short chapter to Israel, India, and Pakistan and devotes comparatively little analysis to the question of Iran or North Korea. Taboo or tradition aside, few would argue with the fact that Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear weapons states have stridently abstained from using nuclear weapons and that current non-NPT nuclear weapons states have shown respect for non-use to date. The burning question is whether rogue states with ideological zealots at the helm would share a similar appreciation for the non-use framework that Paul describes. The relatively minimal analysis dedicated to rogue states stands in

sharp contrast to Paul's voluminous criticism of U.S. policy in the years immediately following 9/11.

Several recent events stand to shape and reflect perceptions on the non-use tradition in the post-George W. Bush era, providing a ready audience for *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons*. Recent policy guidance from the Strategic Posture Commission directly addresses the issue of strategic ambiguity regarding U.S. nuclear use. Additionally, the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review alongside the negotiation of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty follow-on has reinvigorated debate over force structure and the role of nuclear weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of particular significance, the 2010 NPT Review Conference provided a multilateral forum for states to debate the issue of binding negative security assurances versus informal non-use declarations. Policymakers and analysts following these consequential proceedings will find Paul's book of interest.

In light of the significant events ahead, Paul's framework is a timely and important contribution to the nuclear debate that incorporates valuable perspectives from both the rationalist and ideational perspectives. As the issues of arms control, force structure, and disarmament inevitably become mired in political trench warfare, creative and eclectic thinking on nuclear issues will be at a premium. *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* stands to provide an example of the rigorous scrutiny to which classic paradigms must be subjected in the search for real-world policy solutions. **JFQ**

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