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Version: Accepted Version

Book Section:
Considine, L and Souter, J (2021) State responsibilities and international nuclear politics. In: Hansen-Magnusson, H and Vetterlein, A, (eds.) The Routledge Handbook on Responsibility in International Relations. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0367218195.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429266317

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State Responsibilities and International Nuclear Politics

Laura Considine and James Souter

Introduction

Since the development of nuclear weapons during the Second World War, notions and practices of nuclear responsibility have emerged, developed and been contested, and have come to play a central role in international nuclear politics. Conceptions of nuclear responsibility have, either implicitly or explicitly, taken centre stage in political rhetoric and action, international legal instruments, and theoretical debates concerning nuclear weapons. They have also been drawn on for diverse ends by a wide range of actors, whether as part of attempts to contain or eliminate the immensely destructive power of these weapons, or alternatively to legitimate their continued possession by certain states, while delegitimising them for others. Given the immensely destructive power of these weapons, and the fact that their maintenance, use or non-use fundamentally depends on the often-unchecked discretion of state leaders, the stakes surrounding these notions and practices are exceptionally high. One recent example of the shifting and contested nature of claims surrounding nuclear responsibility is the challenge posed to the nuclear status quo by the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Previous notions of nuclear responsibility have often been driven by the nuclear-armed states and typically framed as questions of non-proliferation and nuclear restraint. These dominant conceptions of responsibility have been legitimised through the institutions of global nuclear order, most notably the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, (the Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT), which for five decades has been a touchstone for what is understood as responsible state nuclear behaviour. In contrast, the movement behind the TPNW seeks to stigmatise nuclear weapons as unequivocally irresponsible exercises of state sovereignty and undermine the very idea of a 'responsible' nuclear-armed state.

In this chapter, we begin by outlining some prominent policy discourses surrounding nuclear responsibility since the development of nuclear weapons, identifying the international framework set forth by the NPT, academic debates surrounding the special responsibilities of nuclear powers, as well as some claims to nuclear responsibility made by states themselves. In the second section, we canvass some of the main critiques of these dominant conceptions of nuclear responsibility which, taken together, might be thought to cast doubt on whether nuclear weapons can truly be exercised responsibly, or whether, by their very nature, they defy our conventional understandings of responsibility in international relations and political theory. We point to the ways in which critics have viewed nuclear deterrence as undermining liberal-democratic norms and as involving the issuing of immoral threats against civilian populations, and also introduce an emerging avenue of thought, inspired by republican political theory, which suggests that practices of nuclear deterrence curtail the freedom of the world's

population at large, even if they are never used. Lastly, we look at ways in which nuclear weapons can be said to create dilemmas and conflicts of responsibilities for states.

Nuclear Weapons and State Responsibilities

There is a longstanding idea that the immense destructiveness of nuclear weapons creates particular forms of responsibility in the international domain. For instance, when the development of nuclear technology was in its infancy in 1945, the US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, warned President Truman that US leadership in the development of the atomic bomb 'placed a certain moral responsibility upon us which we cannot shirk without very serious responsibility for any disaster to civilization which it would further' (in Stimson 1947, np). In this account, the extreme destructiveness of these weapons and the disastrous consequences of their use place exceptional responsibilities on their possessors. This is a common reading of responsibility and nuclear weapons, in which states are the key holders of responsibility, and in which these state responsibilities are differentiated between both nuclear-armed and non-nuclear-armed states, as well as between states of greater and lesser power in the international system.

The most notable example of differentiated state nuclear responsibilities is the NPT, which introduced a regime of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament responsibilities that have, in practice, resulted in an understanding of difference depending on whether the state signatory is a nuclear weapons state (NWS) or a non-nuclear weapons state (NNWS). For example, Article VI, the most contested part of the Treaty, refers to the obligations of each state party 'to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament', yet in practice this is seen as a particular responsibility of the NWS, and one which many NNWS claim that they are failing to uphold (Tannenwald 2013; Müller 2010).

Frustration with this apparently inequitable division of international nuclear responsibilities was one starting point for the emergence of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Rejecting the unfulfilled promises of gradual disarmament made within the NPT framework, over the past decade a group of states and campaigners joined together as part of the Humanitarian Initiative on Nuclear Weapons (HINW) to highlight the catastrophic humanitarian effects of any use of nuclear weapons. The campaign culminated in the TPNW, a prohibition treaty that aims to stigmatise the possession of nuclear weapons by casting them as an unavoidably irresponsible exercise of state sovereignty. This has led to heightened contestation over the meaning of nuclear responsibility. For instance, after 122 states at the United Nations voted to adopt the treaty, the US, UK and France released a joint statement in response. These states had boycotted the negotiations and publicly denounced the nuclear ban as

undermining international security. In their statement, the three nuclear-armed states cited the 'common responsibility to protect and strengthen our collective security system' (US et al 2017) that they claimed would be undermined by the ban as a reason for their boycott, thereby placing themselves as actors whose responsible practices of nuclear deterrence provide international security and stability, while labelling the nuclear ban advocates as irresponsible actors.

That certain states have larger responsibilities in the realm of nuclear weapons fits with the idea of the special responsibilities of great powers discussed in the work of theorists such as Hedley Bull. Bull (1980) gives an account of the special rights, duties and responsibilities of great powers and their role in maintaining global order, claiming that great power should take the interests of other states into account when making policy and to include within their own interests the preservation of international order. For Bull (1980, 446), the role of great powers as 'responsible managers' in the international system should always be open to challenge if these powers do not fulfil their special responsibilities. This approach has been developed in the nuclear context in a recent study by a group of prominent international relations scholars (Bukovansky et al. 2012), who argue that the assignment of special responsibilities in international politics can be a way of mediating the tension between the principle of sovereign equality and the reality of vastly differential material power between states, using nuclear weapons as one of their examples. These scholars assert that, while special responsibilities can maintain structures of power and endow certain nuclear states with particular responsibilities for maintaining international order, they are not just reflective of existing power structures but also can attribute special responsibilities to other actors outside of the state and can reshape existing power (Bukovansky et al. 2012, 49-50). An example of the assumption of great power special nuclear responsibility in political discourse can be seen in US President Barack Obama's speech in Prague in 2009, in which he set out a special responsibility for the United States, stating that the US, 'as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon … has a moral responsibility to act' towards disarmament (Obama 2009).[1]

Further academic work has engaged with the idea that the destructiveness of nuclear weapon technology places special responsibilities on nuclear-armed states and has attempted to determine what form such responsibilities might take. William Walker introduced the term 'responsible nuclear sovereignty' (2010) as a framework for understanding the responsibilities of nuclear-armed states. The notion of responsible nuclear sovereignty draws on the existing framework of 'responsible sovereignty' (see Feinstein and Slaughter 2004) – which treats sovereignty not as absolute but as conditional on certain fundamental standards and functions that a state must meet and perform – and applies it to the domain

[1] Obama's presidency saw an intensification of the discourse of responsibility relating to nuclear weapons in the United States (Chacko and Davis 2018). This was linked in particular to the administration's focus on issues of nuclear security and the conception of nuclear responsibility as secure management of nuclear materials and preventing nuclear terrorism. The focus on nuclear security and on responsibility has diminished under the Trump administration.

of nuclear weapons (Walker 2010, 449). Walker identifies a 'spectrum of views on the responsibility of "nuclear sovereigns"', ranging from the realist position that 'the prime responsibility of a state is to use nuclear deterrence for the protection of itself and its citizens', to the cosmopolitan idea that 'all states have a paramount responsibility to abolish nuclear weapons for ethical and prudential reasons' (Walker 2010, 449). Walker also identifies an 'intermediate position', which asserts that

> …although 'nuclear sovereigns' have a responsibility to protect themselves and their citizens from attack or intimidation, nuclear weapons must be used politically and militarily with the utmost restraint, and nuclear-armed states have an exceptional duty of care over the capabilities that they have acquired. Furthermore, they have a responsibility to move themselves and others towards nuclear disarmament – to create the conditions in which it can happen safely, verifiably, and without unduly endangering international order (Walker 2010, 449).

Later work by Walker and Nicholas J. Wheeler developed this concept of 'responsible nuclear sovereignty' and suggested it can act as a helpful means of articulating the responsibilities of nuclear-armed states (Walker and Wheeler 2013). Walker and Wheeler linked the notion of responsible nuclear sovereignty to the 'internal "fitness" of states to engage with nuclear technology', stressing reliability and state capability as key criteria for responsible sovereignty in this domain (2013, 412). The authors suggest that weak states, which are unable to safeguard their nuclear arsenals effectively, will not meet these criteria of responsibility. They therefore claim that 'strong internal governance…must become a *universal* criterion of responsible sovereignty if states and peoples are to be protected from the vicissitudes of state weakness in the nuclear context' (Walker and Wheeler 2013, 428, emphasis in original).

Both the approaches of 'special responsibilities' and 'responsible nuclear sovereignty' focus, to a large extent, on the nuclear-armed state and its moral and legal obligations. Other work has, however, developed approaches to nuclear responsibility based more on conceptions of shared or common responsibilities. For example, Scott Sagan has proposed an alternative notion of responsibility for nuclear disarmament that moves away from disarmament as a realm of decision-making solely reserved for the leaders of the nuclear-armed states and towards a 'coordinated global effort of shared responsibilities between NWS and NNWS' (2009, 158). He argues for a rethinking of the responsibilities within the NPT, reminding us that the NNWS states also have responsibilities under Article VI (to deal with disarmament) and that NWS can share the obligations under Article IV (to accept safeguards) that are most associated with the NNWS. In practice, this would mean NWS reaffirming that their nuclear facilities would someday be under safeguard, and perhaps accepting symbolic safeguards on a few sites. The effort would also include an increased shared financial contribution to safeguards inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as shared funding from all parties in order to develop the necessary technology towards verification that will eventually be needed to ensure disarmament, and a duty on the part of NNWS to go further in ensuring constraints are placed on fuel cycle facilities to reassure NWS about fears of latent weapons

programmes that might prevent them from making deep reductions. This approach does well to expand the idea of nuclear responsibility, but it also comes with the assumption that progress towards disarmament is inhibited by mainly technological rather than political issues, and it asks the NNWS to assume further responsibilities in a political environment in which many of these states are already frustrated with what they see as the NWS lack of fulfilment of their basic responsibilities. Within the nuclear policy world, the idea of shared nuclear responsibilities has been proposed recently as a framework through which to promote dialogue and cooperation in an era of increasing tensions and division. For example, the 2019 NPT Preparatory Committee held a side event hosted by the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) on 'Foregrounding Nuclear Responsibilities for Nuclear Risk Reduction and Disarmament', with representatives from Malaysia, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom.[2]

Whether concentrating on the responsibilities of nuclear-armed states or proposing a vision of shared responsibilities across both nuclear and non-nuclear armed states, the 'dominant norms and practices of nuclear responsibility generally centre on varying conceptions of nuclear restraint' (Leveringhaus and Sullivan de Estrada 2018, 486). What form this nuclear restraint takes can vary, and different state actors have often selectively chosen to emphasise different forms of nuclear responsibility. Nuclear-armed states have all described and justified their continuing nuclear weapons activities in terms of their responsible nature and practices. For instance, the United Kingdom has asserted its pivotal role in a 'rules-based order' (Ritchie 2013; Duncanson and Eschle 2008), its practice of minimum deterrence and the fact that it has the smallest arsenal of any NPT nuclear weapon state and only one nuclear weapon system. China stresses the policy of No First Use (Horsburgh 2015, Leveringhaus and Sullivan de Estrada 2018). India highlights its record on non-proliferation (Sasikumar 2007) and the United States has used the language of nuclear stewardship (Taylor 2010) and nuclear security to emphasise the management of fissile materials as a core nuclear responsibility.

These examples all illustrate the deeply political nature of nuclear responsibility. 'Responsibility talk'[3] in the nuclear context therefore, not only involves recognition of additional duties borne by nuclear-armed states, but 'responsibility' also acts as a label through which states claim their fitness to possess nuclear weapons and through which this fitness can be affirmed or denied by other international actors. For example, at the signing of the US-Indian Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2005, former US President George W. Bush affirmed the US's acceptance of India into the club of self-proclaimed legitimate nuclear states (if not into the NPT as a nuclear weapon state), declaring India to be a responsible nuclear state (Bush and Singh 2005). Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in turn asserted India's

[2] For further information on BASIC's 'nuclear responsibilities' project see https://www.basicint.org/portfolio/nuclear-responsibilities/

[3] For analysis of 'responsibility talk' in world politics, see Bukovansky et al. (2012).

willingness to abide by the practices and assume the responsibilities of states with advanced nuclear technologies. It was thus through the language of responsibility that India staked its claim to the status of legitimate nuclear-armed state (Chacko and Davis 2018, Narlikar 2011, Sasikumar 2007).

As Jan Ruzicka (2018, 381-2) has pointed out, differences in how responsibility is conceived in the nuclear realm, either in terms of the special responsibilities of great power nuclear states to maintain stability through deterrence or as the responsible nature of states that have abandoned or do not seek nuclear weapons, leads to a situation where almost any state can make claims towards responsible behaviour. The political and contested nature of claims to responsible status has been acknowledged by those who have developed the concept. Several recent writings on the notion of responsible nuclear sovereignty, for example, have recognised the possibility that the concept may reinforce, rather than challenge, the nuclear status quo. Walker himself (2010, 451) highlights the 'disconcerting' possibility that states' adherence to norms of responsible nuclear sovereignty 'might become (in part) a pretext for not crossing the threshold into disarmament—rather as alcoholics try to avoid demands to give up drinking by asserting that they are controlling it and generally observing the social graces'. Similarly, a roundtable report published by BASIC acknowledges that

> the framing of responsible nuclear sovereignty alone does not necessarily imply obligations to disarm and therefore might be used to underpin the status quo. It is conceivable that states could coopt the phrase to justify their continued possession of nuclear weapons in well-managed stockpiles (Brixey-Williams and Ingram 2017, 12).

As such, those who advocate the promotion of ideas of responsibility within the realm of nuclear weapons are often also aware that this term can be used in many differing ways, both as a means of developing understanding and cooperation across both nuclear armed and non-nuclear-armed states, as well as a status and as a justification for the continuance of nuclear arsenals.

Critiques of Nuclear Responsibility

In addition to more specific objections to the distribution of international nuclear responsibilities within global nuclear institutions, several authors have critiqued the power structures and imbalances at play in the use of responsibility in the realm of nuclear weapons and its link to western ideas of 'standards of civilisation'. Work such as that of Hugh Gusterson (1999) and Shampa Biswas (2014) questions the orientalist assumptions of a feminised 'third world' who are portrayed as potentially less responsible nuclear actors in contrast to more 'reasonable' and 'responsible' nuclear states. The use of ideas of rationality and reasonability within literature on responsibility can smuggle in ethnocentric assumptions. For example, Walker and Wheeler link responsible nuclear sovereignty to what they term 'reasonable behaviour' (2013, 415). Himadeep Muppiddi critiques the idea of reasonable behaviour by arguing that what he terms 'colonial governance' (2005, 281) assumes the inherent reasonableness of

some actors while questioning that of others. He argues that the US's acceptance of India as a 'responsible' nuclear state in 2005 was the acceptance of India into a colonial order that it had previously challenged (see also Chacko and Davis, 2018). Responsibility is also an example of what Ritu Mathur has identified as the practice of 'sly civility', which for Mathur contributes to the maintenance of the 'nuclear order with its practices of inclusion and exclusion and the West's efforts to control the narrative of nuclear arms control and disarmament' (2016, 59).

From a very different perspective, Kenneth Waltz has also challenged the idea of more or less responsible nuclear armed states. For Waltz (1995), the distribution of responsibility within the international system rests with the distribution of power and the nature of polarity. Nations of any sort that have nuclear weapons are highly incentivised to use them in a responsible way.[4] Therefore, Waltz (1995) dismisses the notion of more or less responsible nuclear weapons states as 'wild rhetoric' and challenges 'ethnocentric views' about non-western states and nuclear weapons.

A final challenge to the notion of responsible nuclear statehood comes from literature that argues that nuclear weapons carry inherent dangers that no amount of responsible behaviour can mitigate (Borrie and Caughley 2014), given the grave risk of global devastation and the potential for 'omnicide' (Craig 2003, xvii) that thermonuclear weapons have introduced to international politics, as well as the history of nuclear near-misses (Lewis et al. 2014), the danger of accidents and miscalculation, and the underappreciated role of luck in past nuclear crises (Pelopidas 2017). The catastrophic consequences of any nuclear explosion have been a focus of the HINW. At three international conferences on the 'Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons' in Norway (2013), Mexico (2014) and Austria (2014), civil society and state representatives were presented with expert testimony on the effects of nuclear weapons on health, the environment, food security, migration and the economy. The findings of these conferences, summarised by Austria, were that the 'impact of a nuclear weapon detonation, irrespective of the cause, would not be constrained by national borders and could have regional and even global consequences, causing destruction, death and displacement as well as profound and long-term damage to the environment, climate, human health and well-being, socioeconomic development, social order and could even threaten the survival of humankind' (2014, 1). These harms are not confined to the use of a nuclear weapon in conflict, given that nuclear testing and the maintenance of nuclear arsenals has caused environmental despoliation and damaging health effects, often with disproportionate effects on indigenous and colonised peoples (Unal et al. 2017; Ruff 2015). While nuclear risk reduction and responsible practices concerning the management and security of fissionable materials can significantly lower the risks posed by nuclear arsenals (see Morgan and Williams 2018), it is also important to recognise that these risks cannot be eliminated by even the most responsible nuclear sovereign.

[4] However, it may be debated what 'responsible use' here means in Waltz's account.

The *Ir*responsibilities of Nuclear Sovereignty

While both scholars and political actors have stressed the need for practices of responsibility in the nuclear domain, in ways which have been subjected to critique, other work poses a more radical challenge to notions of nuclear responsibility, by either implicitly or explicitly suggesting that the possession of nuclear weapons entails some inherent *ir*responsibilities, however responsibly they may be managed in other ways. Whereas it is uncontroversial that the effects of an actual detonation of nuclear weapons would be an act of extreme irresponsibility, given the large-scale violation of the right to life that such an act would entail, and the inability of such weapons to discriminate between combatants and civilians (Thakur 2016, 290), there are arguments suggesting that the mere presence of nuclear weapons in the international system involve some serious irresponsibility. As this section explains, arguments have been made which suggest that states' bare *possession* of nuclear weapons for deterrent purposes subvert their liberal-democratic character, irresponsibly involve an immoral posture towards other states, and curtail the freedom of the world's population even if they are never in fact used. Each line of thought will be outlined in turn.

Undermining liberal democracy

One argument which suggests an inherent irresponsibility in nuclear deterrence is that practices of nuclear deterrence are incompatible with liberal-democratic governance and weaken states' ability to secure freedom for their citizens. Daniel Deudney, for instance, has suggested that 'nuclear weapons generate a profound *legitimacy deficit*' for states in general, but particularly for particular liberal states (Deudney 1995, 91-92; 102, emphasis in original). Deudney suggests that, if state legitimacy depends on its ability to offer security to its citizens, then this is 'fundamentally challenged' by the presence of nuclear weapons in the international system. If physical security (as a lack of physical interference) is understood as a precondition for individual freedom, then the advent of the nuclear age has stripped states of the capacity to secure their citizens' freedom. This then has an effect on the legitimacy of state institutions that the state manages through '*nuclear reclusion'* (1995, 102) (i.e. practices obscuring the implications of nuclear weapons from society by keeping them from public view)[5] and '*declaratory anti-nuclearism',* which consists of publicly espousing anti-nuclear and disarmament rhetoric.

In addition to undermining the legitimacy of the state, nuclear weapons can also be said to undermine democratic governance in particular. While certain liberal authors such as Rawls (1999, 9) have claimed that nuclear weapons can be compatible with the norms of liberal democracy, Henry Shue (2004, 140) has argued that there is a deep tension between the commitment to the individual human being as 'the

[5] Indeed, much has been written about nuclear secrecy (Kinsella 2005), the prevalence of 'nukespeak' (Schiappa 1989; Chilton 1982, 1985) and use of acronyms, technical jargon and arcane language (Cohn 1987) which has discouraged public participation to obscure the terms of debate and discourage public participation in broader issues of maintaining and developing nuclear arsenals.

unit of ultimate value' and the possession of nuclear weapons. Others, such as Deudney, claim that they are 'inherently despotic' for three reasons: 'the speed of nuclear use decisions, the concentration of the nuclear use decision into the hands of one individual, and the lack of accountability stemming from the inability of affected groups to have their interests represented at the moment of nuclear use' (2007, 255; see also Taylor 2007, 671-672).

Relatedly, Elaine Scarry claims that nuclear weapons are irreconcilable not just with democracy but also with a wider and older idea of public consent. Populations cannot be consulted on the choice to use nuclear weapons and this lack of consent, combined with the pain it inflicts, associates nuclear conflict more with a 'mode of torture' (1985, 151) than a mode of war. She therefore claims that consent in nuclear war is 'a structural impossibility' (1985, 152), and in later work points to a situation of 'thermonuclear monarchy' (Scarry 2014). Overall, then, to the extent that states have a responsibility to maintain or create liberal-democratic institutions which respect their citizens' freedom, the operation of nuclear deterrents can be said to undermine this goal.

Hostage-holding and immoral threats

An earlier wave of philosophical work in nuclear ethics during the 1980s identified and debated ways in which practices of nuclear deterrence may involve irresponsibly making immoral threats.[6] As Thomas Doyle (2010, 290) has summarised, when using nuclear deterrence 'officials must regard targeted peoples as mere pawns in the strategic chess game and hostages to state security policy rather than individuals with human rights and dignity'. In this vein, Paul Ramsey famously likened nuclear deterrence to a policy of strapping babies to the bumpers of cars in order to reduce traffic accidents, while others have debated the moral significance of the fact that nuclear deterrence requires states to form an intention to act wrongfully (see e.g. Kavka 1978). More specifically, Steven Lee has argued that nuclear deterrence involves a form of unjustified hostage-holding. For Lee (1985, 553), if hostages are understood as 'persons threatened with harm without their consent in order to control the behaviour of some other person or group' and the act of holding hostages is wrong given their innocence and the risk of harm imposed on them without their consent, then nuclear deterrence involves this form of hostage-holding, for such deterrence wrongfully aims to control the behaviour of another state's leaders by threatening the wider population. Insofar as states bear a responsibility not to form immoral intentions and to engage in immoral behaviour, this line of thought runs, they have a responsibility to avoid engaging in practices of nuclear deterrence.

[6] For a more recent overview of these debates, see Doyle (2010).

Subjection to arbitrary power

Arguments against nuclear deterrence involving analogies with hostages and babies on car bumpers can be questioned because, unlike in the case of babies strapped to the front of cars, those 'held hostage' by nuclear weapons do not seem to have their liberty directly curtailed, at least not as commonly understood (see Lee 1985, 554), but are instead able to continue to lead their personal lives even under the shadow of this deterrence. However, one emerging line of argument draws on republican political theory developed by theorists such as Philip Pettit (1997) to suggest that there is a meaningful sense in which the liberty of the world's population is constrained by practices of nuclear deterrence, even in the absence of any physical interference akin to that suffered by the babies on the bumpers (Considine and Souter 2018). While *some* aspects of nuclear weapons *can* be seen as interfering in the lives and interests of some of the world's population – such as those communities harmed by the environmental effects of nuclear weapons programmes – there is also a case to be made that nuclear weapons irresponsibly violate the freedom of the world's population, whether or not they and their interests are tangibly affected by nuclear weapons, or those weapons cause them any felt harm.

Briefly, republican political theory aims to offer a conception of freedom that is distinct from a liberal conception. Whereas liberals often conceive of freedom in terms of non-interference, republicans instead view it in terms of freedom from *domination*, which is defined as subjection to the arbitrary will of others. A frequent example used to explain the difference between the liberal and republican conceptions is the situation of a slave whose master refrains from interference in the slave's life (Lovett 2018). On the liberal conception of freedom, the slave does not seem to be unfree, as long as no interference takes place. But on the republican conception of freedom, even in the absence of any interference by the slave-owner, the slave is still fundamentally unfree by virtue of being subjected to his arbitrary will; she is dominated even if she is not interfered with. A republican-inspired critique of nuclear deterrence applies this idea to nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons may not interfere in the lives of many of the world's population at all and, as such, cannot be considered to violate freedom understood in liberal terms unless the weapons are used or their maintenance causes harm to certain individuals, for instance, through environmental despoliation. In contrast, a case can be made that the very existence of nuclear weapons means that the world's population remains dominated – that is, subjected to the arbitrary will of others – on an indefinite basis. As critics such as Deudney point out, decision-making power over nuclear arsenals is concentrated in state executives with little or no democratic oversight, allowing for potentially arbitrary and democratically unconstrained nuclear policy. Much like the slave in the example in at least one respect, for as long as nuclear weapons are not used, the world's population do not suffer interference, but are still dominated nevertheless. For republican theorists at least, and anyone convinced by the republican conception of freedom, this kind of domination constitutes an irresponsible action.

Conflicting nuclear responsibilities

If some or all of the above arguments are accepted, it may nevertheless be thought that, while nuclear deterrence involves some forms of inherent irresponsibility, there are some opposing responsibilities held by states which may lead them to *maintain* their nuclear arsenals, namely the responsibility to secure their population against external attack. For instance, Rawls (1999, 9) has, in passing, claimed that 'so long as there are outlaw states…some nuclear weapons need to be retained to keep those states at bay and to make sure they do not obtain and use those weapons against liberal or decent peoples'. For those willing to accept that the state has a responsibility to secure itself through nuclear deterrence, a situation of conflicting responsibilities and moral dilemmas may seem to follow. In particular, Thomas Doyle (2013) has elaborated on particular dilemmas that nuclear deterrence can be said to engender. For example, returning to the arguments put forward by Deudney and Scarry concerning the subversive effect of nuclear deterrence on the liberal-democratic character of the state, and the ability of the state to secure its population's freedom on which its legitimacy depends, Doyle (2013, 160) observes a dilemma, insofar as

> the requirement to secure liberal democracy from external nuclear threats obliges two incompatible courses of action. One is to deter nuclear aggression effectively *via* nuclear deterrence and the despotism with which it comes. The other is to preserve liberal constitutionalism from the threat of outlaw states.

In other words, for Doyle (2013, 160), 'the rule of securing constitutional democracy requires the subversion of the very devices that comprise it'. More generally, Doyle (2015, 20) points to a moral tension involving nuclear weapons, whereby 'cosmopolitan or universal moral principle obliges states to always choose nuclear avoidance while the "morality of states" or the morality of nationalism can oblige states to do whatever is necessary to realize national security or grandeur'. While the existence of these conflicts of responsibility depends on the belief that nuclear weapons are genuinely necessary to ensure the security of states' citizens, and that states have a responsibility to pursue national 'grandeur', such work highlights the ways in which notions of nuclear responsibility fit within larger understandings of international responsibility, potentially creating conflicts and dilemmas with them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have outlined some of the contemporary discourse surrounding nuclear responsibility, in political rhetoric, international law and academic debate, and have introduced some critiques of this discourse. Overall, nuclear weapons might be seen as posing a deep challenge to conventional understandings of responsibility in world politics, given the unprecedented threat they pose to both state and human security. Given this threat, we might also question whether the term 'nuclear responsibility' should ultimately be seen as oxymoronic, for some of the reasons outlined in the last section of this chapter. This survey of notions and practices of nuclear responsibility raises questions pertinent to our understanding of responsibility in international politics more broadly: can

notions of responsibility regulate state power in a domain where there is a lack of direct enforcement of international norms? Given the consequences of any nuclear use, can nuclear deterrence be practiced responsibly? Even if we accept theoretical arguments around responsibility in this context, how will these notions fare in the hands of states in the course of real-life international politics? In the specific case of nuclear responsibility, the ultimate question might be how far notions of responsibility can prevent global catastrophe.

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