VIPIN NARANG

Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation: How States Learned to Love Getting the Bomb

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Mershon Center for International Security Studies
1501 Neil Avenue | Room 120 Columbus, Ohio 43201

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Vipin Narang is Mitsui Career Development Associate Professor of Political Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a member of MIT's Security Studies Program.

He has been a fellow at Harvard University's Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, a predoctoral fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, and a Stanton junior faculty fellow at Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Cooperation. His research interests include nuclear proliferation and strategy, South Asian security, and general security studies.


Narang received his Ph.D. from the Department of Government, Harvard University in May 2010, where he was awarded the Edward M. Chase Prize for the best dissertation in international relations. He holds a B.S. and M.S. in chemical engineering with distinction from Stanford University and an M.Phil with distinction in international relations from Balliol College, Oxford University, where he studied on a Marshall Scholarship.

Abstract

How do states pursue nuclear weapons? The literature on nuclear proliferation has focused on the question of why states might pursue nuclear weapons, while more recent work examines how efficiently states achieve their nuclear ambitions. Yet the question of how states think about pursuing nuclear weapons, or their strategies of proliferation, has been ignored.

This paper explores the strategies of proliferation available to states — hedging, sprinting, sheltered pursuit, and hiding — and develops a theory for which strategies are likely to be chosen at a given time by a given state. I present evidence and codings on the universe of nuclear pursuers suggesting that disaggregating nuclear acquisition strategies is analytically useful.

Although a definitive test of the theory is beyond the scope of this paper, I provide evidence from the Indian case that establishes the plausibility of the theory. I conclude with implications for nonproliferation objectives and policies, suggesting why different strategies of proliferation matters to international security.