Results May Vary: Why States Comply with Cruise Missile Export Controls

Nuclear proliferation has been of great concern for the international community since the Cold War. What was once an arms race between two states— the United States and Soviet Union— has in recent decades become an increasingly attainable type of technology. This is largely due in part to exporting and information sharing, and has thus far made it possible for at least seven more states to acquire. Proliferation is a collective action issue; as such, many actions have been taken to deter proliferation such as with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). What is more alarming is in spite of the many deterrence measures taken, proliferation of weapons delivery systems— especially by states posing serious security risks— continues to increase. Although mostly serving the purpose of carrying conventional payloads, weapons delivery systems including ballistic and cruise missiles are also capable of being equipped with nuclear warheads.

Proliferation of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), capable of reaching a minimum range of more than 5,500 km and primarily designed for nuclear weapons delivery, received much attention from scholars and policy experts over the years. Since the MTCR’s creation in 1987, however, proliferation of ballistic missiles has subsequently decreased dramatically; on the other hand, cruise missile proliferation has greatly increased since the early 1990s. Unlike ballistic missiles, cruise missiles possess several features that make it far more difficult to control their export under the provisions of the MTCR. They can easily be adapted to increase or decrease range, are relatively inexpensive, small enough to easily transport, and can be launched from virtually any platform (air, land, and sea). Having such a large number of characteristics affecting cruise missiles denotes that essentially each cruise missile proposed to be exported must be considered on an individual basis in order to decide whether MTCR provisions apply to it.

While many studies already analyze states’ demand for nuclear, ballistic, and cruise missiles, very little research examines proliferation on the supply-side. Moreover, a significant gap in literature exists concerning compliance to cruise missile regulations, with virtually none examining the suppliers of cruise missiles and their rationale or likelihood of complying to export controls such as the MTCR. These shortcomings lead to the question this thesis focuses upon: In comparing countries with cruise missile technology, why do some exhibit greater compliance with the MTCR than do others?

To answer the proposed question, I will be individually comparing a state’s economic interests, security interests, and bureaucratic capacity to how they each affect compliance to the MTCR. I hypothesize that each of these three factors will have a strong relationship with compliance. As a result in my analysis, I expect that lower bureaucratic capacity of a state will also lead to lower levels of compliance, strong economic dependency will result in a lower level of compliance, and higher security ties to a super power such as the U.S. lead to higher levels of compliance. By studying states’ motivating rationale behind what degree they comply with the MTCR, we are not only filling a hole in research and creating a more holistic picture of weapons proliferation, but the international community can also enhance policies to more effectively deter future proliferation.