

# **The Stigmatization of Nuclear Weapons: Implications for the Potential Transfer of Nuclear Materials**

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# Outline

- Setting the scene
- Terminology: What do we mean by stigma?
- Method: Historical background
- Public perceptions of WMD
- Stigmatization of nuclear weapons
- Relevance of this research
- Conclusion

# Setting the scene

- Product of doctoral research addressing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons
- Purpose of the research was to gain a greater understanding of how and why nuclear weapons remain distinct from other methods of warfare
- Rationale for research: If we can gain a greater understanding of these weapons then greater possibilities are created for control.

# Terminology: What do we mean by Stigma?

- Stigma: a social label created by the reaction of others in society'[1]
- 'Stigma occurs when elements of stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them'.[2]
- Defined in different ways by different investigators: Separation between 'us' and 'them'

[1] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall Inc, 1963;penguin Books  
[2] Bruce G Link and Jo C Phelan. 'Conceptualising Stigma', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, no.3, (August 2001):364

# Method: Historical Background: League of Nations-United Nations

## 1899-1945

- International Peace Conference of the Hague (1899)
- League of Nations (1919-1939):
- Geneva Protocol (1925)
- Preparatory Committee for Disarmament Conference (1926)
- Disarmament Conference (1932)

## Post 1945-1993:

- UN Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC) 1946
- UN Commission for Conventional Armaments (UNCCA) 1946
- The Treaty for the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) 1968
- Biological Weapons Convention (1972)
- Chemical Weapons Convention (1993)

# Findings: WMD and stigma

Applying stigma to a category of warfare (chemical, biological and nuclear weapons):

- A stigma has emerged towards WMD due to the utilitarian, moral and ethical aspects of these weapons
- Efforts to acquire and possess WMD have been associated with perceptions of enhanced political power
- Findings based upon western democratic states perceptions
- Product of scientific knowledge & understanding of the effects and long term consequences of these weapons

# Significance of nuclear weapons

- The condemnation of chemical and biological weapons paved the way for the stigmatisation of nuclear weapons – bottom up and top down
- Nuclear weapons perceived to be the ultimate weapon
- Underlying stigma has shaped arms control efforts since 1945

# Stigmatisation of nuclear weapons

This is founded upon utilitarian and moral/ethical aspects:

- Utilitarian/strategic quality – Immediate impact and long term effects
- Morally abhorrent
- Public fear of nuclear accident (1970's onwards)
- Cold War: Focus on large scale nuclear war

# Stigmatisation of nuclear weapons

Post Cold War:

- Technological developments- increased utility of nuclear weapons
- 9/11 threat of nuclear terrorism
- Increased public awareness of the term WMD has reinforced the stigma amongst general public
- Not to say WMD will not be used, WMD are distinct and with this desirable

# Implications of research for the potential transfer of nuclear materials

Knowledge of stigma can be used as a tool for greater understanding about:

- Actions of non- state actors and potential proliferating states

And lead to:

- Enhanced measures to promote co-operation between states
- Further research into the importance of perceptions of status and power

# Conclusions

- Stigmatization of chemical and biological weapons reinforced the stigmatization of nuclear weapons
- Stigma is a broad process and does not just apply to use
- Nuclear weapons remain distinct: If distinct, also desirable
- Relates to Western democratic states- can it also apply to non-state actors/ potential proliferating states?
- Enables a greater appreciation of measures to secure nuclear material and counter the threat of nuclear terrorism