Dozens of states have long been capable of acquiring nuclear weapons, yet only a few have actually done so. Jacques E. C. Hymans finds that the key to this surprising historical pattern lies not in externally imposed constraints, but rather in state leaders’ conceptions of national identity. Synthesizing a wide range of scholarship from the humanities and social sciences to experimental psychology and neuroscience, Hymans builds a rigorous model of decisionmaking that links identity to emotions and ultimately to nuclear policy choices. Exhaustively researched case studies of France, India, Argentina, and Australia – two countries that got the bomb and two that abstained – demonstrate the value of this model while debunking common myths. This book will be invaluable to policymakers and concerned citizens who are frustrated with the frequent misjudgments of states’ nuclear ambitions, and to scholars who seek a better understanding of how leaders make big foreign policy decisions.

Jacques E. C. Hymans is Assistant Professor of Government at Smith College, Massachusetts.
The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation

Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy

Jacques E. C. Hymans
Contents

List of figures vii
List of tables viii
Preface ix
List of acronyms and abbreviations xii

1 Introduction: life in a nuclear-capable crowd 1
2 Leaders’ national identity conceptions and nuclear choices 16
3 Measuring leaders’ national identity conceptions 47
4 The struggle over the bomb in the French Fourth Republic 85
5 Australia’s search for security: nuclear umbrella, armament, or abolition? 114
6 Argentina’s nuclear ambition – and restraint 141
7 “We have a big bomb now”: India’s nuclear U-turn 171
8 Conclusion: lessons for policy 204

Appendix: Coding rules and results 229
Bibliography 236
Name index 261
Subject index 264
Figures

1.1 Potential vs. actual nuclear proliferation  

3.1 Quantitative results on Australian prime ministers’ NICs, 1945–75  

3.2 Quantitative results on Argentine presidents’ NICs, 1966–2004  

3.3 Quantitative results on Indian prime ministers’ NICs, 1947–2004  

3.4 Quantitative results on French prime ministers’ NICs, 1944–55
Tables

1.1 Cohen’s “India and the bomb: a catalog of arguments” (abridged) page 10
2.1 Four ideal-typical national identity conceptions (NICs) 25
2.2 Leaders’ NICs and likely nuclear policy preferences 38
2.3 Case selection criteria 42
2.4 The cases vs. commonly asserted explanations for the bomb 43
3.1 Possible interpretations of Australian prime ministers’ NICs 59
3.2 Summary of raw data quality for content analysis (Australia) 60
3.3 Global assessment of Australian leaders’ NICs 63
3.4 Possible interpretations of Argentine presidents’ NICs 65
3.5 Summary of raw data quality for content analysis (Argentina) 66
3.6 Global assessment of Argentine leaders’ NICs 70
3.7 Possible interpretations of Indian prime ministers’ NICs 72
3.8 Summary of raw data quality for content analysis (India) 73
3.9 Global assessment of Indian leaders’ NICs 77
3.10 Possible interpretations of French prime ministers’ NICs 80
3.11 Summary of raw data quality for content analysis (France) 81
3.12 Global assessment of French prime ministers’ NICs, 1944–55 84
8.1 Summary of the theory’s performance 207
A1 Australia: key comparison other (KCO) codings (by individual prime ministers) 233
List of tables

A2 Argentina: key comparison other (KCO) codings (by individual and grouped presidents) 234
A3 India: key comparison other (KCO) codings (by individual and grouped prime ministers) 234
A4 France: key comparison other (KCO) codings (by individual and grouped prime ministers) 235
Preface

One southern winter evening in Buenos Aires, I met Dr. Conrado Varotto, father of Argentina’s once-secret uranium enrichment program. “The bomb is in the human heart or it isn’t,” he told me. “We could have done it, but we didn’t, because the bomb was not in our hearts.” I was skeptical of Varotto’s claim, but in the end, after a great deal of research and thought, I decided he was right. Indeed, in a sense this book is an extended elaboration on Dr. Varotto’s basic point. It argues that decisions to go or not to go nuclear reflect the psychology of the leaders who make them. In particular, there are discrete decisionmaking pathways leading from different national identity conceptions, through emotions, to ultimate nuclear choices. This argument not only provides what I think is a powerful answer to the nuclear proliferation puzzle; it also provides a potentially fruitful basis for thinking about foreign policy decisionmaking more generally.

The project is nothing if not ambitious, and I am deeply grateful to the hundreds of people who have assisted and encouraged me to develop it. I owe a profound debt to the many politicians, scientists, civil servants, scholars, archivists, activists, and others who offered me their time and wisdom (and in some cases, their spare bedroom) as I struggled to discover the truth of their nations’ nuclear histories. Some of these people are referenced directly in the text, but I am equally grateful to them all. Of course, their cooperation should not be taken to imply that they necessarily endorse the overall argument that I have tried to make here.

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Preface

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AAEC  Australian Atomic Energy Commission
AEC    Atomic Energy Commission (India)
ALP    Australian Labor Party
ANZUS  Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty
BJP    Bharatiya Janata Party (India)
CANDU  Canada Deuterium Uranium (nuclear reactor)
CEA    Commissariat à l’Energie Atomique (France)
CNEA   Comisión Nacional de Energía Atómica (Argentina)
CNIA   Current Notes on International Affairs (official Australian publication)
CTBT   Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DRDO   Defence Research and Development Organisation (India)
EDC    European Defense Community
EURATOM European Atomic Community
IAEA   International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF    International Monetary Fund
INVAP  Investigaciones Aplicadas, S.E. (Argentine corporation)
KWU    Kraftwerk Union (German corporation)
NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIC    National Identity Conception
NNPA   Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (United States)
NPT    Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
PNE    Peaceful Nuclear Explosion
PTBT   Partial Test Ban Treaty
SNEPP  Study Nuclear Explosion for Peaceful Purposes (Indian project)