**Chapter 12**

**The nuclear taboo**

Nuclear weapons have not been used in warfare since the terrible bombings of the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Constructivist scholar Nina Tannenwald argues that this reflects the development of a very strong norm against the use of nuclear weapons. This ‘nuclear taboo’ arguably shows how norms and conventions increasingly affect—and often bind or circumscribe—military capabilities. For instance, since their extensive use in the First World War there seems to have developed a similar, though less strong, taboo against using chemical weapons in warfare.

Watch this video with Nina Tannenwald: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcnBtHp6Imw> as well as this additional video on the nuclear taboo: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-XX1wyDQeY>

Furthermore, read the following short article by Richard Price (2017): "After Syria, is there still a taboo against the use of chemical weapons?", *Washington Post - The Monkey Cage*: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/04/07/after-syria-is-there-still-a-taboo-against-the-use-of-chemical-weapons/>

## ****Assignments****

1. Explain why material factors are not sufficient to explain the non-use of nuclear weapons since 1945.
2. What is a norm in international relations and how can the nuclear taboo constrain decisions makers, even in times of war?
3. Discuss whether the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war means that the taboo against the use of chemical weapons has broken down.
4. Are we likely to see the use of chemical and/or nuclear weapons in the coming decades? Discuss.