

THE NUCLEAR OBSESSION:

II. PROLIFERATION, AND U.S. ALLIES

Jack Walker

If anything has been adopted as the single, most important, immediate objective of the U.S. "Foreign Policy Establishment," it is the conclusion, with the Soviet Union, of a treaty designed to discourage the spread of nuclear weapons to countries that do not already possess them. I use the word "discourage," because it seems clear that the treaty itself is not intended to produce anything more than an abstention, on the part of the U.S. and the USSR, from active participation in the act of proliferation. There is to be no commitment, or so it would appear, to joint action (economic, political, or military) to *prevent* the spread of nuclear weapons. This point will be explored further in the late paragraphs concerned with the internal contradictions of the anticipated nonproliferation agreement itself. At this point it is sufficient to note that an immense head of steam has been built up around the central proposition that the treaty *must* be achieved.

To be sure, there is a certain superficial attractiveness about the arguments in favor of such a treaty. It is thought, first of all, that the probability of nuclear war will increase, (geometrically, Secretary of Defense McNamara would have it) with the spread of nuclear weapons. It is argued, in addition, that a small nuclear power could act as a "catalyst" by dispatching a nuclear weapon into the territory of a great power which then would attribute the deed to its major opponent. It is thought also that newer nuclear countries will, somehow or other, be less "responsible" with their weapons than we or the Soviets have come to be.

Now the purpose of this essay is not to analyze in depth the arguments currently advanced in support of a nonproliferation treaty. While it is extremely difficult to argue against such a treaty, given the current balance of domestic forces (the President, the *New York Times*, and Senator Kennedy favor it and, worst of all, an opponent of the treaty easily can be made to look like an advocate of nuclear arms races), it still needs to be said that the argu-

The author of this article, second in a series, has long had a professional interest in military and political aspects of modern warfare.

ments are only assumptions—and nonverifiable ones at that.

They have about them the general atmosphere promoted by what might be called "Dr. Strangelove" thinking. If we do not take the appropriate steps, so the argument seems to go, some sort of "madman" (a Hitler, Castro, Mao?) will propel the world into the abyss of nuclear destruction. It is not clear at all, of course, what effect a nonproliferation agreement between the U.S. and the Soviets will have upon a prospective Hitler.

But enough of that. What is important here is to point out that the critical requirement is to pursue the logic of a nonproliferation treaty, to attempt to portray the international political situation *after* the conclusion of the treaty. If one can do that, while avoiding the ever-present temptation to fall back into the trap of nuclear obsession, then it may become clear that support for the nonproliferation treaty involves one in a new set of contradictions.

Contradiction No. 1: The U.S. and Its Allies (India). If the U.S. concludes a nonproliferation treaty with the Soviets, it will become committed to a policy of open opposition to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by countries which do not now possess them. Even if we cannot agree to *prevent* such proliferation we will, at least, be expected to raise our diplomatic voice in loud protest and to express disapproval of any decision by one of the "nth" countries to take the nuclear option. Within the next decade or two, which countries are likely to take such a decision?

Assuming for the moment that France and China are unlikely to be affected by an agreement between the U.S. and the Soviets, and this appears to be a reasonable assumption, any list of countries most likely to "go nuclear" would have to include the following: India, Japan, Germany, Pakistan, Israel, United Arab Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, and South Africa. Some of those countries, especially those further down the list, are and have been in something of a dubious relationship with the U.S. The first three, however, are now, and should be expected to remain, allies of the U.S.

It has become relatively clear in recent years that

India is of vast importance to the U.S. in terms of the need for counterweights to the expansion of Chinese influence. If India was, at one time, aggressively neutral, it has become slightly less so. Even if India continues to regard Pakistan as the most proximate threat to its nationhood, there can be no denying the Indian fear of China. When the Chinese attacked India only a few years ago, the U.S. response indicated clearly that India was considered something of a traditional ally. Should another such attack materialize, the U.S. doubtless will lend both moral and material support to India. It ought to be equally clear that the Indians may feel themselves compelled to develop a nuclear capability as a specific deterrent to the Chinese. Where would this leave the U.S.?

The logic of the nonproliferation treaty will require the U.S. to do whatever it can to *prevent* India from acquiring a nuclear capability, even if the Indians decide that they must do *just that* as a means of countering Chinese pressure. The U.S. will find itself ignoring Chinese nuclear capability, presumably because it was acquired before the treaty went into effect or because the Chinese had themselves ignored the treaty, while making every effort to force the Indians to find some other way of meeting the Chinese threat. To put it mildly, this will present something of an incongruous picture.

The U.S. will find itself berating India for being a "perpetrator of the nuclear arms race," and a "destabilizing influence." The U.S. will argue that India should have known all along that it could depend upon a U.S. guarantee against Chinese nuclear power, even in the face of evidence that the Europeans have not felt secure with just such guarantees. Bizarre as it may seem now, it is reasonable to expect that the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations may have to occupy himself making speeches denouncing the Indians. Should this sequence of events occur while Madame Gandhi is in power, the U.S. will find itself forced to use many of the slogans currently used to describe the President of France. Admittedly, this will pose a difficult problem in the difficult international art of "image-building," but is it not the central logic of a U.S. commitment to nonproliferation?

Simply stated, the question is whether the U.S. should put itself in a position that will force it to quarrel interminably with countries it would like to consider its firm friends. This is not intended to be an argument in favor of active U.S. support for nuclear weapons development in India, Japan, Germany, *et al*, but only an argument that the U.S. should *not* take on a posture forcing it to openly

oppose such countries. It should be remembered, after all, that the recent history of Franco-American relations might have been substantially different if the U.S. had handled the nuclear problem in a different manner. While a direct analogy is impossible, this recent history suggests that the U.S. and India would find it impossible to agree on other important questions in the face of total U.S. opposition to Indian acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Contradiction No. 2: The U.S. and Its Allies (Germany and NATO). A West German leader recently was quoted as expressing his disapproval of the prospective nonproliferation treaty on the grounds that it would provide for the "entry into NATO of a sixteenth member, the Soviet Union." George Bailey, writing in *The Reporter*, has described the new tensions being set loose in Europe as a logical outcome of a U.S. decision to turn away from the alliance system it has built since World War II in favor of a return to the alliance that was victorious in the war itself. In short, the détente between the U.S. and the USSR gradually is being transformed into a new form of alliance (based upon an agreement about nuclear weapons) that is directed against Germany.

There can be little doubt that the prime reason for the apparently intense interest in the treaty recently displayed by the Soviets traces solely to the fact that the treaty will become something of a guarantee to the Soviets that the Germans will not take up nuclear weaponry. As if that were not enough, the U.S. (and the British) have engaged themselves in an unseemly argument with the Germans over the payments connected with the maintenance of Allied armed forces in Germany. In the mysterious ways of diplomacy, the central question no longer concerns the strategic necessity, or lack of it, of maintaining such forces, but only the effect of those forces upon the U.S. balance of payments. This is an important question, of course, but scarcely one which should itself determine troop dispositions. It seems equally clear that the U.S. search for the nonproliferation treaty, taken together with the quarrel over conventional forces, have contributed in a major way to current unrest in Germany itself.

If we project ourselves into the political situation after the signing of the treaty, it seems reasonable enough to expect a strong German reaction. Sooner or later, German activists will be able to use the nuclear question as a device with which to bargain over the broader question of German unification. If, as seems likely, the Germans will not be satisfied by future U.S. decisions on troop deployments; if, as also seems likely, the Germans will not enjoy the status that the U.S.-USSR nonproliferation treaty

will confer on them; if, as also seems likely, all of this inevitably will lead to a deeper and more severe erosion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization than we have seen up till now, what is the U.S. approach to dealing with these eventualities should they occur?

The public record indicates that the U.S. (and perhaps the Soviets as well) are so obsessed with the drive for a treaty that neither fully explored the probable long-term consequences in Europe. On the U.S. side, there is little or no evidence to show that the future of NATO has been adequately considered. Now perhaps NATO should be abandoned, and perhaps we should surrender our long-standing notion of developing a strong partnership with a more or less united Europe, but the evidence is that the Government believes that a nonproliferation treaty is compatible with the maintenance of a strong NATO. On the Soviet side, there is no indication that the Soviets appreciate the additional pressures for unification that are likely to emerge within Germany as an outcome of the treaty. The Soviets, however, can be expected to insist that the U.S. keep the West Germans under control.

Germany is the kind of country likely to become quite unstable once it becomes convinced it has been abandoned by its principal ally. This could lead to a sudden turn toward France and a strengthening of the Franco-German alliance that has been largely dormant since its conclusion a few years ago; and it is well to recall that democracy within Germany still has to be regarded as a fragile flower that has not had very much time to grow strong.

A Broader Look at the Problem. Please note that in making these separate analyses of U.S. relationships with India and Germany and how they are likely to be affected by the nonproliferation treaty, I do not argue that the U.S. should treat communism as a monolith which must be opposed everywhere with equal strength. I see nothing wrong at all with ever increasing attempts to further the atmosphere of détente in Europe through the conclusion of political, economic, and cultural agreements of various sorts. Indeed, I shall even argue in a subsequent essay that U.S. recognition of China and the entry of that country into the United Nations are objectives that should be pursued with great zeal. At this point, I am touching only briefly upon immensely complex questions concerning the nature of nuclear weapons and international alliances. The questions have not been explored in the U.S. because of the nature of the nuclear obsession itself, which seems to demand that the U.S. take any sort of "anti-nuclear pledge" without careful analysis of the conse-

quences. I shall carry this analysis one step further in an attempt to demonstrate the types of questions being overlooked.

It is generally admitted that a nonproliferation treaty would be most effective if it included, as a minimum, all those countries which already possess a nuclear capability, e.g., France and China. If all the nuclear powers were included, it might also be reasonable to hope that the treaty would include provisions for the use of sanctions against other countries that might exhibit a desire to acquire such weapons. After all, the spread of nuclear weapons seems (in the view of those espousing the nonproliferation treaty) at least as dangerous as the spread of *apartheid* approaches in Africa, so that economic sanctions against new nuclear countries would be at least as appealing as actions aimed at Rhodesia and South Africa. If all the nuclear powers were included in a nonproliferation treaty, and if Canada then decided to develop nuclear weapons, for example, the U.S. would be pressured (by China and the Soviets, among others) to impose economic sanctions against Canada.

Is it unreasonable to point out that the U.S. should think long and hard before it embarks upon a course which probably will lead to a topsy-turvy world in which its commitments to a peculiar form of "anti-nuclear" alliance force it to renounce all of its other alliances? The list of countries most likely to "go nuclear" indicates that this is a problem of greater consequence to us than to the Soviets. The current Sino-Soviet rift is not likely to be deepened solely as the result of a Soviet-American nonproliferation treaty.

I have tried to show thus far that the nuclear obsession has led, in the first instance, to some new theories of warfare which have made it all too easy, indeed dangerously so, formally to commit U.S. troops to battle in the mistaken notion that wars can be fought at low cost and, in the second instance, to a course of action which promises to force the U.S. into some ridiculous postures vis-à-vis its allies as the latter attempt to deal with what they regard as threats to their security.

Nuclear weapons are indeed a formidable threat, and I do not wish for a moment to minimize the dangers of living with them. I am arguing that two decades of experience in living with such weapons do not constitute sufficient evidence for the wiping out of all we have learned over the years about international politics in general. To put it another way, it is quite easy for the individual, or nation, to bring about a result precisely the opposite of what is intended by the application of a superficially valid moral principle.