

# THE NONPROLIFERATION TREATY: AN IMPOSSIBLE ALLIANCE?

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The Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (N.P.T.) has been in effect since March of 1970, the debate over its wisdom has quietly passed into history, and we seem to be living comfortably with the notion that its ratification was a significant step toward international peace. I want to suggest here that we have yet to face up to the problems which almost inevitably lie ahead.

*The N.P.T. as Alliance.* The N.P.T. concept dates from a time when most of us looked upon the nuclear world as truly bipolar. Both the U.S. and USSR felt that it would be better to deal with the certainties of this bipolarity than with the uncertainties of proliferation. Each of us worried solemnly about the supposed inability of other countries to be "rational" in their management of nuclear weapons. Both of us worried about the Chinese; the Soviets were quite fearful of having nuclear weapons in the hands of the West Germans; and we of the U.S. became truly upset over the possibility that Castro might end up with unfettered control over some nuclear weaponry.

The fundamental logic of the N.P.T. resembled then, as it does now, a nineteenth-century balance-of-power agreement between the principal possessors of power. These early elitist agreements struck bargains which pointed in two directions. They indicated, on the one hand, that direct power conflicts between the states should be placed in temporary limbo so as to avoid the costs of direct confrontation. The same bargains indicated, on the other hand, that joint action would be taken against outsiders who attempted to upset the balance. Nineteenth-century agreements were limited ones, often arrived at by powers having many fundamental points of disagreement with each other. The N.P.T. is such a coldly calculated, limited agreement and not a real commitment, on ideological grounds, to undertake those measures which will halt the spread of nuclear weapons. The superpowers did not, for example, seriously consider taking joint measures to destroy French and Chinese nuclear capabilities when these were first revealed, tending to demon-

strate just how limited indeed is the commitment to nonproliferation.

The atmosphere surrounding the N.P.T. has been one of euphoria, reminiscent of that surrounding the Kellogg-Briand Pact of four decades ago. Now, as then, the principal supporters of the treaty simply fail to realize that there can be no question of an ideological commitment in agreements of this kind. They stand to be disillusioned when the superpowers face the tough questions connected with the N.P.T.

The decision to ratify the N.P.T. came in the wake of United Nations Security Council Resolution 255 of June, 1968, and separate U.S. and USSR statements issued as interpretations of how the superpowers would approach the tough questions. Taken together, the Resolution and the interpretations seem to say that if a non-nuclear state becomes the victim of aggression involving nuclear weapons, or is the object of a nuclear threat, the U.S. and USSR will be obliged to act through the Security Council "to counter such aggression or to remove the threat of such aggression."

Both the Resolution and the statements were understandably vague because (at the risk of oversimplification) the limited strategic alliance between the superpowers requires them to reach agreement with each other whenever nuclear stability is threatened. Complicating the problem is the fact that nothing can be done in the Security Council unless France and Nationalist China agree to it—and, if the China problem is one day resolved and Communist China replaces Taiwan, then both nuclear subpowers (as well as the British) would have to be included in an agreement on action to be taken. Further, both the Security Council Resolution and the U.S. and USSR statements imply that protection will be available only to non-nuclear states which sign the N.P.T., i.e., only to states which renounce permanently an interest in acquiring nuclear weapons.

Even when one allows for all these qualifications, however, one is left to conclude that the future of the N.P.T. depends primarily upon the ability of the superpowers to function as allies and to agree on a specific course of action when the first chal-

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lenge appears. But I will argue that the first challenge is likely to be the challenge of further proliferation itself; second, that other ties to the superpowers will be more significant than formal adherence to the N.P.T.; and, finally, that the only possible agreement between superpowers will be one which permits still further proliferation—not an altogether undesirable outcome, oddly enough.

*The Nature of Future Challenges to the N.P.T.* Such countries as India, Japan, Israel, and Egypt have not been among those clamoring for an opportunity to adhere to the N.P.T., and perhaps it is well to begin looking at “if” situations slightly in advance of the time they occur. This analysis thus begins with a hypothetical assumption: that the Israelis have just announced the acquisition of a substantial nuclear capability, sufficient to destroy all major cities in the Arab countries, and that the evidence supports its credibility.

I admit at the outset that the hypothetical case is not a *legally* pure one. The Security Council Resolution and the superpower statements imply, for example, that action will be taken only if an explicit threat is involved and if the country threatened is an adherent of the N.P.T. But I argue here that mere possession by the Israelis of substantial nuclear capability would be seen by the Arab states as an immediate threat and that, in addition, the fact that Arab states may not be adherents of the N.P.T. will not dissuade them from requesting Soviet assistance.

It seems to me that the analytical problem before us is to determine what course(s) of action the superpowers would find it possible to agree upon. I discern four categories of actions that might be undertaken, offered here for the purpose of analysis: (1) actions taken under U.N. auspices; (2) joint U.S.-USSR actions; (3) unilateral actions of the U.S. tacitly approved by the Soviets; and (4) unilateral actions of the USSR tacitly approved by the U.S. Two other categories of action are so unlikely to be taken that we can dismiss them at this point: Neither the U.S. nor the USSR are likely to accept completely unilateral action on the part of the other of which it disapproves. Now for a look at the possibilities:

1. *Actions taken under U.N. auspices.* The strategic nuclear question is one of those issues so fundamental to big-power relations as to make it unlikely that the U.N. apparatus will be capable of dealing with it for quite some years. I have already mentioned that any U.N. action would require approval by the French, and by the Chinese (of whatever political hue). While I do not intend to dismiss this possibility lightly, it remains the case that the U.S.

and the USSR could probably implement any course of action they agreed upon regardless of the balance within the U.N. Thus, opposition by the French and Chinese would simply represent an additional obstacle that it might not be completely necessary to overcome. Risking abruptness, then, I rule out further consideration of this approach.

2. *Joint U.S.-USSR actions.* I refer here to those completely coordinated and truly joint actions that the superpowers might take. An explicit listing might be of help:

a. Joint agreement to defend the Arab states. In this situation, the U.S. and the USSR would agree to retaliate against any Israeli nuclear attack upon one or more Arab states. Because this would tend to commit the U.S. in advance to automatic military attack upon a staunch ally, the U.S. would be most unlikely to agree to it.

b. Joint demand that Israel disarm itself under penalty of attack by the superpowers. The U.S. and the USSR would issue an ultimatum demanding that Israel destroy its nuclear weapons and forever renounce future production. After expiration of a suitable time limit the superpowers would jointly attack Israeli production capabilities and weapon stores, thus removing the capabilities. While this approach comes closest to representing the ideological commitment inherent in the N.P.T., it is most difficult to imagine the U.S. committing itself to this type of automatic attack.

c. Joint U.S.-USSR support of Israel. In this situation, the superpowers would advise Egypt and other Arab states to recognize the inevitable and accept an agreement with the Israelis on the best terms available. Without overestimating items like “prestige” and “face,” it is difficult to envision the Soviets insisting that their dependencies in the Middle East follow such a course.

3. *Unilateral actions of the U.S. tacitly approved by the Soviets.* The alternatives possible here seem little more attractive than those listed earlier:

a. U.S. guarantee of Egyptian security. This would commit the U.S. to respond against the Israelis in the event of a nuclear attack upon Egypt. This type of automatic commitment to attack a U.S. ally probably would be politically infeasible.

b. U.S. resolute support of Israel. For the U.S. to stand unqualifiedly behind Israel would be to invite a direct confrontation with the USSR. If the U.S. were to pledge support to Israel, the USSR could hardly do other than reiterate its total support of the Arab states; there could be no clearer road to nuclear showdown.

c. U.S. demand that Israel disarm itself under

threat of attack. If the U.S. were to demand that the Israelis dispose of nuclear capabilities, it would be necessary to take action to insure attainment of the objective, even if the Israelis failed to do so. Again, this would require automatic attack by the U.S. of an ally—hardly a feasible alternative.

4. *Unilateral actions of the USSR tacitly approved by the U.S.*

a. USSR guarantee of Egyptian security. This is doubtless the type of guarantee the Egyptians would like to have, but the U.S. would intensely dislike having the Soviets automatically committed to enter any conflict on the side of the Egyptians. As President Nixon has put it, the conflict in the Middle East is dangerous primarily because it opens the door to direct confrontation between the superpowers. Should the U.S. accept an alternative of this sort, it would have little choice later on but to agree to support Israel. This approach, in short, would go too far in hastening direct superpower confrontation.

b. USSR demand that Israel disarm itself under threat of attack. The U.S. would find it most difficult to accept the notion that the Soviets should be turned loose to disarm Israel of nuclear weapons. This approach would just as surely lead to direct superpower confrontation.

c. USSR provision of nuclear weapons to Egypt in a "two-key" arrangement. The "two-key" solution has a long and relatively distinguished history in NATO. In reality, however, the "two-key" approach has insured that any confrontation in Europe will indeed involve the superpowers. We have guaranteed the Soviets that none of our allies could act independently in nuclear matters—or at least that was the case until the French pursued an independent line. To permit a Soviet-Egyptian two-key solution, however, would be a different matter altogether. Inevitably, the Soviets would be completely drawn into all Israel-Egypt confrontations, and we could hardly expect to remain outside.

d. USSR provision of nuclear weapons to Egypt under unilateral Egyptian control. Of the major alternatives listed here, this one appears the most likely and feasible. While it is not the type of policy one proclaims proudly from housetops, it seems to offer fewer disabilities than any of the others. It would, perhaps, enable the superpowers to avoid being pulled into every regional confrontation in the Middle East. The U.S. and USSR, once they have arrived at such a tacit understanding, could advise Israel and Egypt that they would be largely "on their own" if they decide to employ nuclear weapons or to threaten their use.

The above analytical exercise might be described

as one designed to produce the most likely alternative from among a group of undesirable policy choices. It may startle some, but that is because we in the U.S. seek, almost ostentatiously, to avoid this type of analysis until it is forced upon us. But unless I am wrong in saying that the N.P.T. is not an ideological commitment to prevent proliferation, the assumptions and policy options outlined here are those the superpowers are likely to face in the relatively near future. That the Egyptians have not signed the N.P.T. will not preclude their asking for assistance, and both the U.S. and the USSR will have to act.

*What About Balanced Proliferation?* If further nuclear proliferation is to be inevitable, perhaps the best we can hope for is the development of some form of balanced proliferation. It might be better, for example, for Israel and Egypt to become nuclear powers at approximately the same time—as opposed to having one or the other "go nuclear" quite a few years before the other. While I understand the argument that proliferation itself is highly dangerous, we may have to make a choice between balanced and unbalanced forms. If all proliferation is to be avoided, countries such as Israel, Japan, and India will have to believe more completely in the U.S. nuclear umbrella than France felt it possible to do.

For, whatever its surface unattractiveness, balanced proliferation might tend to extend the geographical area of nuclear stability. An Egypt and an Israel both armed with a substantial nuclear capability might hesitate before launching the relatively smaller attacks that have become so commonplace in the Middle East. Balanced proliferation might be preferable in similar situations in other regions as well.

The approach taken here will doubtless be abhorrent to those who dislike talking about nuclear questions, to those for whom the N.P.T. remains an ideological commitment, and to those who insist that the spread of nuclear arms is *always* the worst alternative whatever the precise situation. These people might do well to construct their own set of alternatives within the boundaries of the assumptions set out at the start of the analysis. Assume for the moment that one country or another will enter the nuclear club in the near future, then make for yourself a list of the feasible alternatives.

There is danger in the disillusion that may follow from widespread realization that the N.P.T. is much less than it appears at first glance. Already terribly weakened by the French and Chinese examples, currently being further debilitated by French refusal to cooperate with implementing actions in Europe, the N.P.T. is gradually emerging as little more than a statement of pious hope.