

US -- UNDUE ALARM OVER NUCLEAR SPREAD?

*Amoussad Elg...
intelligence...
F.-42*

Munich, Oct 20 (CNR) -- the following article by Ernest W. Lefever, appeared in The Wall Street Journal, Oct 15, 1976

1

In his accelerated effort to slow down the spread of nuclear arms technology, President Ford last August sent Secretary of State Kissinger to Pakistan to persuade Prime Minister Bhutto not to buy a plutonium reprocessing plant from France. The mission was backed by thinly veiled congressional threats to withhold development of security assistance if Pakistan persisted in the French deal. On the same trip, Mr. Kissinger pressured Paris to cancel the arrangement. Just a few days ago, the French government indicated a new willingness to discuss limits on nuclear exports.

Mr. Kissinger sought to achieve in Pakistan what he achieved in South Korea last January. A congressionally-supported State Department threat to withhold Export-Import Bank financing for a \$292 million Westinghouse power reactor forced Seoul to cancel the planned purchase of a French plutonium reprocessing plant. In 1975 Washington failed to prevent the consummation of a comprehensive nuclear assistance agreement between West Germany and Brazil which in time will provide the latter with the technology for making nuclear weapons, though U.S. pressure helped to ensure the stiff safeguards against "weapons application" written into the pact.

The stubborn problems of "nuclear proliferation" are made less tractable by the imprecise and often apocalyptic language in which they are discussed. The very term "proliferation" has confused the issue. Borrowed from biology, proliferation implies a natural or automatic multiplication of members of a certain species, e.g. the spread of the Swine Flu virus.

There is nothing natural or automatic about the spread of nuclear weapons. Nuclear technology spreads, but nuclear bombs do not "proliferate" from one country to another like reactors or power stations. As far as is known, not a single bomb has ever been transferred from one government to another by loan, gift, sale, or theft, in spite of rare attempts, such as that of Libya's Khadafy to purchase them from Peking. The chances of terrorists stealing a bomb or bomb-grade nuclear material have been exaggerated.

If additional governments acquire nuclear forces they will be of their own manufacture. Any decision to go nuclear is the result of a protracted, agonizing cost-benefit analysis, especially for a country with scarce human and technical resources. Once a decision is made, the road is long,

hard, costly, and replete with political risks, as the cases of France, China and India demonstrate.

It took New Delhi 15 years and perhaps \$3 million to conduct its modest explosion; this expenditure was only a small part of India's extensive nuclear research program which only a handful of Third World states can match. Working at maximum speed, it would take years for India to build a small force capable of reaching targets in Pakistan. A force capable of striking China would require a sophisticated missile-delivery system.

J. Robert Oppenheimer once said of the hydrogen bomb: "It was so technically sweet, we had to do it." But the assumption that a technical nuclear arms capability always (or usually) leads to nuclear arms has not been ratified by recent history. Six or more European states have long had this capability, but for political reasons they have refrained from exercising it.

Neither Prime Minister Gandhi nor her father pressed ahead with their costly nuclear effort because it was "technically sweet," but because they felt severely threatened by China. Likewise, Israel's nuclear force was built to enhance its security and ensure its survival. The profoundly political decision to go nuclear is rooted in fear and nourished by the ever-present desire for prestige.

The four governments today that probably feel most strongly the need to develop a nuclear deterrent, or to make preparations for exercising that option, are confronted by remarkably similar external threats. Each faces a nuclear adversary and each lacks confidence that its chief ally, the United States, will come to its aid if it is attacked. South Korea faces a belligerent North Korea backed by China and the Soviet Union, Taiwan faces China, Pakistan faces India, and Iran faces the Soviet Union.

Since the fall of Saigon, each of these exposed states has felt an erosion of the

A Widely-Held Assumption

The continuing U.S. efforts to halt, deter, or slow down the manufacture of nuclear arms by additional governments is rooted in the widely-held assumption that the danger of local or strategic war or nuclear blackmail will inevitably rise with the increasing number of governments that possess them. The chief corollary of this assumption is that the U.S. and the other nuclear-competent countries (the big nuclear powers plus West Germany, East Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Italy, and Poland) should refrain from exporting reprocessing plants, enrichment facilities, or other weapons-related nuclear technologies to states which do not now have them. Failing that, such exports should be accompanied by vigorous legal and physical safeguards against weapons applications. In mid-1975, Washington established a consortium for these purposes along with the Soviet Union, Britain, West Germany, France, Japan and Canada.

This denial-of-capability effort is seen by the participants as a more effective deterrent to new nuclear forces than the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which embraces 100 adherents, but not some of those most inclined to go nuclear, such as Israel, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Argentina and Brazil. (India had its first nuclear explosion in May 1974 and informed observers believe that Israel has a small, but militarily significant nuclear force.)

Two assumptions--that additional national nuclear forces will automatically increase the likelihood of nuclear war and that the most effective way to prevent or deter nuclear acquisition by Third World governments is to deny them the necessary technology--deserve more critical examination.

(P70)

(2)

American commitment. The anxiety is sharpest in Seoul because of occasional congressional demands for the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and in Taipei because of pressure for Washington to normalize relations with Peking. Their fear of being abandoned virtually compels them to seek a substitute for the problematical U.S. commitment, a substitute of their own making and under their own control. And what better vehicle of self-reliance than a national nuclear deterrent?

Any nuclear force is a two-edged sword. Just like conventional arms, nuclear weapons can deter or provoke, but the post-Hiroshima experience demonstrates that nuclear arms have never provoked a nuclear war, or even a conventional war. To acknowledge that nuclear arms to date have had a stabilizing impact is not to assert that they always will, but it surely suggests that the apocalyptic voices predicting nuclear war by the 1950s or 1960s were dead wrong.

One does not have to love the bomb to caution against undue alarm over additional nuclear forces. The alarm was sounded in the case of France, but where is the evidence that the strategic balance of terror was weakened by France's independent deterrent? Has China's membership in the nuclear club or India's 1974 explosion made the world more dangerous? Does Israel's presumed possession of a dozen nuclear bombs enhance or detract from stability in the Middle East?

Looking to the future, the burden of proof certainly rests with those who would argue that additional national nuclear arsenals would be good for local and world stability. But an equal burden of proof rests upon those who maintain—as most spokesmen in the arms control community seem to—that all further acquisitions anywhere and in all circumstances are equally dangerous.

The Nub of the Matter

In pursuing its non-acquisition objective, Washington has overemphasized multilateral instruments such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the suppliers' consortium and neglected efforts to deal with the basic motivation of exposed states to go nuclear. This is the nub of the question. We cannot prevent the spread of nuclear technology, which is needed by many countries as a source of energy. But we can help undercut the impulse to make nuclear arms by continuing or increasing the U.S. security commitment to several crucial states. The extension of a nuclear guarantee, defense pact, or military assistance—and in some cases the provision of U.S. troops—is the single most effective way to encourage nuclear abstinence.

As Fred C. Ikle, director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, said in 1975:

"For many non-nuclear powers, protection against nuclear threat or attack rests on American commitments. America's self-interest dictates that we sustain our alliances. If we withdraw our protection—or if confidence in it were shaken—strong internal pressures would arise in many countries to acquire nuclear armaments for their own protection. . . . To the degree that we appear to turn inward, we encourage non-nuclear nations—from Asia to Europe and the Middle East—to create their own nuclear forces."

Mr. Lefever is director of the Ethics and Public Policy Program of the Kennedy Institute at Georgetown University and a former Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution where he studied U.S. policy toward nuclear arms in the Third World.

A/1020/26