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W. W. Rostow

November 19, 1964

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A Way of Thinking About Nuclear Proliferation

Introduction

The decision by a country to develop nuclear weapons -- leaving the U.S. and the USSR aside -- has been and will continue to be a complex politico-military calculus at the highest and most sensitive levels of national policy-making. It is the argument of this memorandum that, if we intend to limit or stop nuclear proliferation, we must look at the specific factors which affect that calculus in different capitals and operate directly upon them. Present thought about nuclear proliferation tends to vacillate between proposals for overall arms control measures (e.g., an all-environment test ban) and rather fine-grained attempts to apply a little pressure here and there on an ad hoc basis, as with the Israeli. It is only by reconstructing the complex calculus faced by the various governments concerned and mounting policies of substance and weight to influence the components of that calculus that we have a chance of shaping the course of events -- not merely in preventing new nations from entering the nuclear club but in influencing their subsequent course of behavior.

1. Arguments for

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1. Arguments for the Production of Nuclear Weapons. In general the following six elements have tended to argue, in different combinations in different capitals, for the production of nuclear weapons:

-- National pride; that is, as a demonstration of scientific and industrial virtuosity.

-- As an entrance ticket to the highest levels of East-West diplomacy.

-- To exert increased influence on the two nuclear superpowers; that is, to enhance a nation's position within its own power bloc.

-- To provide deterrent military power should collective security arrangements fail.

-- To strengthen the diplomatic weight of a nation's diplomatic and non-nuclear military initiatives, including (in the Chinese Communist case) the possible practice of nuclear blackmail a la russe 1956-1962.

-- To gain access to certain areas of industrial technology uniquely associated with nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

2. Arguments Against

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2. Arguments Against the Production of Nuclear Weapons.

The following arguments, in different combinations, have influenced or are now influencing governments to forego the production of nuclear weapons.

Pacific arguments.

-- A generalized sense that proliferation increases the likelihood of nuclear war.

-- The production of nuclear weapons is a step away from rather than towards arms control.

-- Since the test ban treaty atmospheric tests involve for signatories to the treaty a denunciation, while underground tests are complex and expansive.

Regional complications.

-- Production of nuclear weapons and delivery capabilities may complicate or endanger the political stability within a region, yielding undesirable playback effects on the country which goes the national nuclear route.

Security arguments.

-- Nuclear production and delivery facilities are likely to be promptly targeted by atomic powers in the other bloc and the danger of atomic attack is increased.

-- In isolated

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-- In isolated confrontation between a small nuclear power and a superpower the possibility of providing a credible deterrent is difficult.

-- The acquisition of a national capability may relieve the allied or potentially allied superpower, in some degree, of responsibility for acting in support of the small nuclear power; and, in any case, the insistence of the right to fire a national nuclear capability tends to dilute collective security arrangements.

Economic argument.

-- A national nuclear capability is expensive; and, although it enlarges the scope and role of certain modern industries, the constructive playback effects on the civil economy are highly limited.

3. In the light of this array of considerations, certain observations can be made on the decisions already taken by the U.K., France, and China as follows:

United Kingdom. Given its wartime experience and status, the three most powerful arguments in Britain were those of national pride, the maintenance of a place in the top East-West club, and the maintenance or expansion of London's influence

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influence on Washington. Notably after the experience of Suez, the argument for a reserve minimal national deterrent, at a time of isolation and extreme danger, may have played some part in Britain's persistence as a national nuclear power. Aside from nuclear capabilities as a ticket to Moscow and Washington, the argument of extra weight behind British diplomacy did not figure greatly in British thought, though it figures increasingly as an ultimate element of bargaining for a British role on the continent, in the wake of de Gaulle's Common Market veto. The British decision to proceed was taken at a stage when various national considerations easily overrode the possibility that the British decision would increase the likelihood of war or move away from arms control measures; and the test ban treaty did not then exist. London was relatively callous or opaque about the long-run consequences of its decision on French and German behavior, tending to think of quasi-equality with Washington rather than of its continental relations. With a sense of considerable confidence in the military alliance with the U.S., the negative security considerations did not exist or were easily overridden. The economic cost of the enterprise was accepted but has gained weight

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weight as a negative factor, with the passage of time, as has an increased consciousness of the playback effects of British policy on other nations (notably Germany and France).

France. Positive considerations, almost identical with those in London, moved the government of France in the 1950's to proceed with the production of nuclear weapons, with the added fillip of staying equal to the British in a critical field. The French decision was taken at a time when the negative arguments were overridden in France on much the same grounds as they were overridden earlier in Britain. And there was, as in London, a certain lack of appreciation of the long-run consequences on German policy of a French decision to proceed with a force de frappe. The French argument for a national nuclear force as dernier ressort (should the defense of Germany fail) was made more explicitly than in the case of Britain; and French historical experience on the continent, in one sense, justified a higher rating for this factor. Suez contributed marginally.

In the most inner discussions in Paris one critical issue may have been the argument that a French acquisition of a nuclear capability which Germany could not match, gave

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France some long-run balance in the French-German relationship. Despite arguments to the contrary, French confidence in the U.S. and NATO overrode the three negative security arguments. The economic factor was overridden initially, but may gather weight with the passage of time, as may an increased consciousness of the playback effects of French policy on German nuclear policy.

Communist China. The Chinese arguments in favor of a national capability closely parallel those of Britain and France, with this added dimension: the possibility of exerting increased diplomatic pressure in Asia against the background of a Chinese nuclear capability. The strength of these positive arguments easily overrode the negative pacific arguments; that is, increasing the likelihood of war; moving away from arms control; and the political costs -- such as they may be -- of conducting atmospheric tests. With respect to the complication of regional relations, China (like Britain, and then France) has not taken into account seriously (or it has overridden) such anxieties as may have arisen over whether Japan and India might be led, by its initiative, also to develop nuclear capabilities. Peiping is probably conscious, to some degree, of the increased

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of the increased vulnerability that the creation of a national nuclear capability might bring about; but it either accepted this enhanced vulnerability or underestimated it. As for a dilution in the collective security commitment of Moscow to China's defense, Peiping must have judged that the Soviet commitment, in any case, was fairly dilute, notably if China intended to pursue objectives which were not shared or sanctioned in Moscow. The Quemoy-Matsu experience of 1958 may have been important in this context.

The economic cost of the enterprise was accepted, given the overriding view of the advantages initially taken; it remains to be seen whether it will weigh more heavily with the passage of time, along with the playback effects of Chinese Communist nuclear policy on Japan and India.

4. Potential Future Nuclear Powers. Turning now to India, Japan, Israel, and Sweden, the following observations can be made.*

India.

*The peculiarly complex case of Germany is left out of this exploratory paper; although it evidently deserves rigorous attention.

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India. National pride is evidently one positive factor which may grow in importance, as the younger generation comes forward in Indian politics. This may be strengthened by the fear that a lack of an Indian nuclear capability will exclude India (and elevate China) in global negotiations at the highest level, in the UN Security Council, etc. On the other hand, some in New Delhi may calculate that the development of a national nuclear capability might diminish rather than increase Delhi's capacity to generate military and diplomatic support in Washington and Moscow. The calculation may be that a non-nuclear India can get more support from these two essential quarters than nuclear India. The strictly security argument for a deterrent in extremis is more powerful than in any of the other cases thus far examined, given the looseness of India's collective security commitments; although, as suggested below, there are contrary security considerations. The notion of adding weight to Indian diplomacy beyond its borders is relatively unimportant. On the negative side the pacific factors do operate in Indian life: the political feeling in India at the present time is influenced by the warlike nature of the act required and the problem posed by atmospheric

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atmospheric or even underground testing. Moreover, there may be more sensitivity in Delhi than is articulated about the implications of an Indian nuclear capability for relations with Pakistan. Given New Delhi's probable sense that it could not have a significant capability for a considerable period of time, there may also be a consciousness of its increased transitional vulnerability and of the possible diminution in the willingness of the U.S. -- and possibly the Soviet Union -- to support it in a confrontation with China if it bases its security on a national capability. If this is to be persuasive, however, Moscow and/or Washington will have to make such an eventuality credible to Indian leaders in some way. The logic of the situation will not automatically do so.

The economic argument probably weighs quite heavily in the Indian calculus, notably in the face of conflicting considerations on the positive side of the calculus.

Japan. In Japan the arguments pro and anti may not have been explored as systematically as they have been in New Delhi: the Indians have been brooding over the Chicom nuclear capability for some time; the Japanese have been living under the Soviet nuclear gun for some time, covered by the U.S.

deterrent

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deterrent, so that the Chicom event is somewhat less sharp, and their underlying fear of Russia is greater than their fear of China. One can guess that a positive impulse among a good many Japanese, which may grow in time, is national pride and an unwillingness for the long pull to see China engage in technical and military activities unmatched in Japan. As in the case of India, the impulse to build a national nuclear force as a ticket to the top East-West club and to increase influence in Washington is probably weak. The consideration of having a reserve deterrent in extremis may be lurking in the background and would certainly increase, in degree, should the U.S. fail to hold in Southeast Asia; but Japan, unlike India, is already targeted by the Russians and may feel that it has no other serious military recourse than to rely on the U.S. in confronting the Communists. At the present time the Japanese probably do not contemplate any diplomatic activities which would be positively affected if they were conducted against the background of a national nuclear capability. The three negative pacific arguments
against

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against developing a national nuclear capability are obviously strong in Japanese political life -- probably stronger than in New Delhi. On the other hand, there is no equivalent in Tokyo to the quiet anxieties in Delhi about Pakistan. But the arguments of vulnerability and of possible dilution in the U.S. security commitment are (or will be) quite powerful in Tokyo when the calculus is drawn up and understood.

Israel. In the case of Israel the argument for the development of a national nuclear capability is almost uniquely military; that is, as a reserve deterrent power in a moment of desperate confrontation with Cairo. In particular, the Israeli, with their extraordinarily heightened sense of vulnerability, are worried about an Arab attack conducted so swiftly as to make U.S. or Western support too late to be effective. This narrow but intense anxiety brings the Israelis close to the point of ignoring the negative arguments of a general pacific kind^{and} the possible playback effects of what it does on the decision of Cairo. It does not contemplate a confrontation with one of the superpowers; and, therefore, the relationship with the U.S. and possible damage to that relationship are the only major restraints on proceeding to achieve a national nuclear capability,

Sweden.

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Sweden. The argument in Stockholm is, as in the case of Israel, an almost purely military argument. The intensity of the Swedish sense of vulnerability with respect to the Soviet Union is, however, not as great as that of Israel with respect to Egypt. Moreover, the negative pacific arguments still retain great strength in Swedish political life. The Swedes, given the general acceptance of their special neutral military position, probably do not envision any regional complications in Scandinavia; and, indeed, this factor may shift to the other side of the calculus should Denmark and Norway enter the MLF, leaving Sweden uniquely among the three Scandinavian countries, without a nuclear role. The possibility of a direct bilateral confrontation with Russia is probably more real in the minds of men in Stockholm than it is in London, Paris, or Tokyo where the presence of the U.S. is, in fact, assumed. The serious and sustained Swedish expenditures on civil defense and on its military posture generally attest to this likelihood. Since Stockholm's military policy has long been based on the proposition that it must make an attack on Sweden sufficiently costly for the Russians to set it aside as a rational course of action, this perspective

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perspective does argue, in a nuclear age, for the development of a Swedish force de frappe. Finally, it is probably calculated in Stockholm that Swedish acquisition of a national nuclear capability is not likely to affect greatly -- one way or another -- the U.S. commitment to Swedish defense as a part of the Free World and an essential element in Europe's northern flank.

Some critical questions. What follows from this way of looking at the nuclear proliferation problem?

A. We must mount policies which will weaken the positive and strengthen the negative arguments in each capital. Although some of those policies may be general or applied in quite different quarters of the globe, we require a concentration on the calculus in each capital; for, in an important sense, each case is unique. The country statements made above are, of course, meant to be preliminary and suggestive rather than definitive.

B. With respect to the weakening of positive elements, the following appear to be critical questions with respect to both India and Japan:

-- Can we find

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-- Can we find alternative expressions of national pride in the terrain of modern science and technology and on the world scene (e.g., by UN Security Council membership)?

-- Can we enhance their sense of participation in nuclear matters, in the area of both defense and arms control?

-- Can we enhance their sense of confidence in the relevance of U.S. military power as an effective check on Chinese Communist expansion?

-- Can we -- and especially the U.K. -- use the possible occasion of their entrance in the MLF to persuade the Japanese and the Indians that they regret their earlier commitment to a national nuclear capability and to urge that the wise course -- economically, politically, and militarily -- is to opt for collective security arrangements? (A British move in this direction, tending to make the French and Chicom postures appear demodé, might be quite helpful.)

C. With respect to the strengthening of the negative elements in the calculus of India and Japan, the following are critical questions:

-- Are there any U.S.-Soviet moves in the field of arms control that would suggest that serious movement forward may be possible, thus strengthening the negative pacific arguments?

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(Although this is the classic field for action, it should not be over-estimated, unless the movement forward is serious. Put another way, barring a serious (not symbolic) breakthrough in the arms control field, we should not count excessively, or for long, on the weight of these negative pacific factors. We must operate on other elements in the calculus.)

-- Can we heighten in Delhi a sense of the danger to India that might come about via the reaction of Pakistan to an Indian nuclear capability?

-- Can we tactfully heighten in Tokyo a sense of the increased vulnerability that a small national nuclear capability might bring, including a dilution of the U.S. nuclear commitment? (The optimum form for this kind of implicit exercise would be to seize with both hands the Japanese invitation to enrich the present bilateral military exchanges on nuclear strategy, deterrence, etc.)

-- Is there any way (aside from holding Laos and South Viet Nam) to heighten India's willingness to rely, implicitly or explicitly, on the U.S. nuclear deterrent. In that connection, can we (or should we) move towards some collective

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collective Asian defense effort -- consultative or operational -- in nuclear and other fields embracing Japan, India, and others willing to join?

D. With respect to Israel, the familiar question is whether there is a combination of stick and carrot, of pressure and reassurance, we can mount without wrecking either our relation to Israel or our tenuous links to the Arabs. A heightening of Israeli anxiety about an Arab nuclear capability is an asset we can and should use.

E. With respect to Sweden, the issue is likely to turn on whether we succeed or fail in all our other efforts to halt nuclear proliferation.

5. A Conclusion. The title of this memorandum is exact. It is designed not to state firm conclusions but to suggest a way systematically and realistically to think about the nuclear proliferation problem. Nevertheless, it immediately poses some interesting perspectives:

-- We must not think of arms control measures (e.g., an all-environment test ban) in the abstract: we must think of their role in the context of each relevant nation's calculus. The pacific negative factors to which they appeal are a real

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are a real (but varying) force in the several capitals; but they are not an overriding force. It is likely, therefore, that successful action on the other elements in the equation will be required before arms control measures will prove acceptable.

-- U.K. participation in the MLF, especially if accompanied by German and Italian non-diffusion declarations, might be turned to good account in Asia and elsewhere, notably if the U.K. government would play in dramatizing the logic of its retreat from a national nuclear capability.

-- Whether we succeed or fail in Southeast Asia will affect the calculus in New Delhi and Tokyo.

-- We ought to be probing more actively for an Asian security grouping larger than SEATO, perhaps narrowly related to the Chicom nuclear capability, including Japan, India, and, hopefully, Pakistan.

-- Lacking serious arms control measures with the USSR, we may have to evoke more toughly something which is true but hard to say properly, so powerful is the threat; namely, that those who build national nuclear forces and claim the independent right to fire thereby circumscribe the U.S. commitment to their defense.

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