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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Winter, 2004/2005), pp. 100-135

Published by: [The MIT Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137557>

Accessed: 18/09/2012 15:11

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Blasts from the Past

Francis J. Gavin

Proliferation Lessons from the 1960s

The National Security Strategy document issued by the George W. Bush administration in 2002 portrays a world far different from that of the past. The Cold War was dangerous, but according to this document, its lessons are largely irrelevant to the making of contemporary U.S. strategy. After the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the United States faced a “status quo, risk-adverse” adversary—the Soviet Union—that believed that weapons of mass destruction should be used only as a last resort. In contrast, the United States is currently confronted by “rogue states” that “brutalize their own people,” “threaten their neighbors,” “sponsor terrorism,” and “hate the United States and everything for which it stands.” Most important, rogue states “are determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction” to “achieve the aggressive designs of these regimes.” In so doing, they have created a world that is far “more complex and dangerous” than the international system of the 1960s. As a result, Cold War concepts such as deterrence are ineffective in a “security environment that has undergone profound transformation.”¹

U.S. policymakers responsible for assessing international politics following the testing of an atomic device by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 16, 1964, would have been puzzled by the Bush administration’s characterization of their world. Four decades ago, the threat posed by a

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The author would like to thank the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Donald D. Harrington Faculty Fellowship, and the Policy Research Institute at the LBJ School of Public Affairs for funding the research and writing of this article. Earlier versions of this piece were presented at the Program on International Security at the University of Chicago, the International Security Studies program at Yale University, the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Center for Science and International Security at Stanford University, and the Ph.D. Colloquium at the LBJ School. The author is grateful to the participants in those seminars for their helpful suggestions, including Ted Bromund, Mark Kramer, John Mearsheimer, Mark Sheetz, Stephen Van Evera, James Walsh, and especially Scott Sagan. For their comments and suggestions, he would like to thank the journal’s two anonymous reviewers, as well as Andrew Erdmann, Bob Inman, Melvin Leffler, Leopoldo Nuti, Elspeth Rostow, Jeremi Suri, Marc Trachtenberg, and especially Natalie Britton, Michael Gerson, and Thomas Schwartz.

1. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>, pp. 13–15.

nuclear-armed China under Mao Zedong was far more terrifying than anything Iraq's Saddam Hussein or current "rogue" rulers could muster. China, with a population of more than 700 million in 1964, had already fought the United States in Korea; attacked India; and threatened Indochina, Indonesia, and Taiwan. It supported violent revolutionary groups around the world whose goals clashed with U.S. interests. Mao's internal policies had led to the deaths of millions of Chinese citizens, and he had already declared that nuclear war with the United States was not to be feared. In Mao's words, "If the worse came to the worst and half of mankind died, the other half would remain while imperialism would be razed to the ground and the whole world would become socialist."² To the United States, such actions and statements made the PRC appear not only irrational but perhaps undeterrable.

It is well known that the United States considered a wide array of responses to China's 1964 atomic test, including a preemptive attack. What is less well known is that the ascension of this "rogue" state into the world's nuclear ranks inspired a searching debate within the U.S. government over how to respond to emerging and potential nuclear powers. The issue went beyond the question of how China would behave with atomic weapons to the core questions that policymakers continue to grapple with today: for example, could the United States slow the pace of nuclear proliferation, and if even if it could, would the price be too high to pay? Or is the prevention of nuclear proliferation so important that it trumps other policy considerations, and no effort or expense should be spared to achieve it?

Under President Lyndon Johnson, the United States transformed its nuclear nonproliferation strategy to meet these challenges. Starting with the creation of a little-known but highly influential group of experts referred to as the "Gilpatric committee," the administration laid the foundations for a far more robust nonproliferation policy, which would eventually lead to the negotiation, in cooperation with the Soviet Union, of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).³ This shift, which has been missed almost entirely in the historical and

2. Mao Zedong, "We Must Not Fear Nuclear War," cited in Richard Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1999), chap. 5. For the quotation, see <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/wynjones/wynjones05.html>.

3. Accounts that underplay the influence of the Gilpatric committee on U.S. nonproliferation strategy include Shane Maddock, "The Nth Country Conundrum: The American and Soviet Quest for Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1945–1970," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1997; Raymond L. Garthoff, *A Journey through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2001), p. 194; and Glenn T. Seaborg, *Stemming the Tide: Arms Control in the Johnson Years* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1987), p. 148. Two important exceptions include

strategic studies literature, was not inevitable. Indeed, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the Johnson administration's nonproliferation policy represented a clear departure from that of John F. Kennedy's administration, which did little to halt proliferation. Nor was it a policy that would be embraced by Richard Nixon's administration, which downgraded nonproliferation as a priority. During its evolution, the Johnson administration's nonproliferation strategy encountered opposition both within and without the U.S. government because it marked a shift away from traditional Cold War policy. Success demanded cooperation with the United States' sworn enemy, the Soviet Union, to constrain American allies. In particular, this new strategy required the United States to put heavy pressure on the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany) to accept permanent nonnuclear status without receiving anything in return.

The risks for the United States of doing nothing after China's 1964 atomic test, however, were considered too great to ignore. As one member of the Gilpatric committee stated, nuclear proliferation demanded that the U.S. government "reexamine thoughtfully and objectively all of our NATO and East-West-China and nuclear postures with a clear and untrammelled mind. If, in the course of our thinking, we have to give up past thinking or past theories, then let us weigh the consequences of change" to determine whether a new strategy would leave the United States "better or worse off."⁴ Despite intense opposition and significant risks, the Johnson administration crafted a strong nonproliferation policy that, for the most part, was a success, laying the groundwork for détente with the Soviets while constraining worldwide nuclear proliferation.

This article rewrites the history of a crucial period in U.S. foreign policy-making in several fundamental ways. First, it reveals the consideration by a U.S. administration to condone, and in some cases aid, nuclear proliferation in the 1960s; it also assesses the strength of arguments in favor of such a strategy. Second, it explores the reasons why the Johnson administration ultimately adopted a robust nonproliferation policy, despite the many obstacles to success. Third, it shows how the administration's nonproliferation policy often

George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 103; and Thomas Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

4. Notes of Arthur H. Dean to Roswell Gilpatric, John J. McCloy, and Arthur Watson Jr., December 13, 1964, National Security Files (hereafter cited as NSF), Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 1, p. 2, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter cited as LBJL).

challenged assumptions about U.S. relations with allies and enemies alike, revealing a much more complex international order in the 1960s than simplistic accounts of the Cold War portray. Finally, it highlights some of the important lessons that policymakers today may find useful as they continue to address the pressing issue of nuclear proliferation in states such as Iran and North Korea.

The first section of this article examines the varied reactions of Johnson administration officials to China's 1964 atomic test, in particular, their great concern over the potential regional and global consequences of the nuclear arming of a "rogue" adversary. The second section details the wide range of policies—from actively aiding proliferation to encouraging nuclear rollback—considered by the Gilpatric committee. The third section chronicles the broad disagreement within the Johnson administration over how to handle nuclear proliferation and the committee's efforts to address these differences. The fourth section reveals the obstacles the U.S. government faced in trying to prevent other states from acquiring nuclear weapons, many of which still pose challenges today. The fifth section charts the most explosive issue for the Johnson administration: the possible effects of a revised nonproliferation policy on U.S. relations with the FRG. It also chronicles the furious struggle that influential policymakers in Washington and Bonn waged to undermine the eventual adoption of this policy. The sixth section examines the Gilpatric committee's recommendations and discusses why, despite the barriers to success, the administration decided to adopt many of its proposals.

China's Atomic Test and Worldwide Proliferation

U.S. intelligence had been aware of China's desire to test an atomic device for some time. During the Limited Test Ban Treaty talks between the Americans and the Soviets in the summer of 1963, U.S. negotiator Averell Harriman attempted to gauge Soviet reaction both to the increasing likelihood of China becoming a nuclear power and to the possibility of a preventive strike by the United States, either alone or with the Soviet Union, against China's nuclear infrastructure. U.S. government officials revisited the idea of a preventive strike in the months before China's October 1964 detonation.⁵

5. See William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–64," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 54–99.

Several factors help to explain the Johnson administration's growing concern over the possibility of China acquiring a nuclear capability. First, the PRC was already pursuing an expansionist foreign policy: it had attacked India in 1962; it was continuing to threaten Taiwan; and it was seeking to influence events in Indonesia. Of even greater concern, its support for North Vietnam and the Vietcong insurgency against the U.S.-sponsored government in South Vietnam made a future military clash with a nuclear-armed PRC a distinct possibility. According to U.S. National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, a nuclear-armed China would be "the greatest single threat to the status quo over the next few years."⁶ President Kennedy agreed: China's nuclear program, he said, was "the whole reason for having a test ban."⁷ China's leadership had denounced the easing of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union following the peaceful resolution of the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis, while U.S. policymakers increasingly viewed Mao's regime as both irrational and extremist. One U.S. analyst asserted that a nuclear-armed PRC would become even more aggressive and harder to deter. In his view, the Chinese appeared "determined to eject the United States from Asia" and were sure to "exploit their nuclear weapons for this end." The same analyst predicted that China would have "thermonuclear weapons" by 1970, and that by 1980, "it [would] be necessary to think in terms of a possible 100 million U.S. deaths whenever a serious conflict with China threatens."⁸ Given Mao's "doctrine of the inevitability of nuclear war," John McCloy, an occasional adviser to the Johnson administration, argued that unless the Western alliance was strengthened to meet this threat, nuclear war was "almost inevitable."⁹

In the early 1960s, therefore, China possessed all the features of what is commonly referred to as a "rogue" regime. To many, the U.S. strategy of containment and nuclear deterrence, which had kept the Soviet Union at bay for so many years, appeared inapplicable to the Chinese.

In the wake of China's 1964 atomic test, fears within the Johnson administration that other states would want to follow the PRC's lead only grew. Accord-

6. Memo, Bundy to Kennedy, November 8, 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), 1961–1963, Vol. 7, p. 598.

7. Glen Seaborg diary, entry February 8, 1963, quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 384.

8. "China as a Nuclear Power (Some Thoughts prior to the Chinese Test)," author unknown, October 7, 1964, NSF, Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 5, p. 2, LBJL.

9. John McCloy, untitled and undated memo, Papers of John J. McCloy, box DA1, folder 86A, p. 7, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

ing to a 1964 National Security Council (NSC) report, four countries—India, Israel, Japan, and Sweden—had “the technical capability to produce nuclear weapons” and were “considering whether or not to do so.”¹⁰ Around the same time, Gilpatric committee staffer Russell Murray painted an even bleaker picture: “At least eleven nations (India, Japan, Israel, Sweden, West Germany, Italy, Canada, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Rumania and Yugoslavia) have or will soon have the capability of making nuclear weapons, given the requisite national decision. Within the foreseeable future . . . the number will grow substantially. The Union of South Africa, the United Arab Republic, Spain, Brazil and Mexico may be included.”¹¹

For Japan, which already felt threatened by the Soviet Union, the entry of its ancient rival, China, into the nuclear club was a cause for great concern. Recognizing this predicament, U.S. Undersecretary of State George Ball reported that as a result of the Chinese detonation, Japan would be “under some pressure” to develop its own nuclear capability. Japan’s new prime minister, who declared that “Japan should provide herself some nuclear deterrents,” only reinforced this view.¹² India, despite its public support for a nonproliferation treaty, had even more incentive than Japan to develop atomic weapons, having lost a conventional war to China in 1962 and lacking an alliance with either the Soviet Union or the United States. According to Ball, the Chinese atomic test meant there “was a fifty-fifty” chance that the Indians would seek to develop nuclear weapons.¹³ Pakistan would then have little choice but to follow suit. China’s nuclearization could also push Indonesia into pursuing a similar course, which in turn could force Australia into having to decide whether to develop an indigenous nuclear capability.¹⁴ South Korea and Taiwan might also want to acquire atomic weapons, especially if a nuclear-armed China diminished U.S. power and undermined the credibility of U.S. defense commit-

10. National Security Council, “The Value and Feasibility of a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,” December 12, 1964, NSF, Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 2, p. 1, LBJL.

11. Russell Murray, “Problems of Nuclear Proliferation outside Europe,” December 7, 1964, p. 1, Declassified Documents Reference System (hereafter cited as DDRS), document no. CK3100281620.

12. Memcon, Couve de Murville, Charles Lucet, George Ball, and Charles Bohlen, December 2, 1964, record group (RG) 59, lot 67D2, box 7, p. 2, United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as USNA).

13. *Ibid.*

14. For Indonesia’s threat to detonate a nuclear device, see Ropa for Bundy, “The Asia Week,” September 20, 1965, DDRS document no. CK3100238073, p. 6. For a later threat by the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu, see Cover Note, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, and Intelligence Note, “Romanians Will Ratify NPT but Will Want Something for It,” October 20, 1969, box 366, National Security Council Files (hereafter cited as NSC), Nixon Presidential Materials, USNA.

ments in the region. Nor could the United States rely on domestic and cultural taboos against nuclear weapons to prevent proliferation in Asia. As Murray noted at the time, "Though public opposition may be strong, the governmental-military elite in some countries (e.g., India, Japan) is far ahead of the public. A nuclear decision may be made and advanced under the guise of a peaceful program while public opinion is shifting."¹⁵

The Chinese test also convinced many U.S. officials that nuclear proliferation would not be confined to Asia. Israel already had a weapons program, and Egypt was expected to launch one as well. Argentina, Brazil, and even Mexico were considered candidates to develop atomic bombs. Intelligence officials believed that Sweden, Switzerland, and even Italy were contemplating nuclear weapons programs. Without a change in U.S. policy, the dangerous but predictable nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union would be replaced by a race among medium and even small powers to arm themselves with weapons of mass destruction.

Whether the United States could adapt its Cold War policies to meet this new threat would largely hinge on perhaps the most pressing issue of the bipolar standoff: the possibility of West Germany coming into possession of atomic weapons. Facing the Soviet behemoth, the FRG had a tremendous incentive to acquire nuclear weapons. In addition, the possibility of widespread proliferation, particularly by less developed states, could challenge German national pride and prestige, only adding to the pronuclear pressure building in the country.¹⁶ As one U.S. official noted, "Should India, Israel, Japan or Sweden acquire an independent nuclear capability, the Federal Republic of Germany would doubtless come to feel that it had accepted second-class status by not acquiring its own independent nuclear force."¹⁷

At the same time, both the nascent U.S.-Soviet détente that emerged following the successful conclusion of the Cuban missile crisis, as well global stability more generally, depended critically on West Germany remaining nonnuclear. In the words of a U.S. official, "German national nuclear capability is virtually a Soviet obsession, based upon a deep-seated emotional fear of resurgent German militarism."¹⁸ The Soviets went so far as to argue that they were con-

15. Russell Murray, "Problems of Nuclear Proliferation outside Europe (Problem 2)," December 7, 1964, NSF, Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 5, p. 3, LBJL.

16. "The Value and Feasibility of a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," p. 14.

17. "Position Paper on a Non-Proliferation Agreement," author unknown, July 16, 1965, DDRS, document no. CK3100079658.

18. "The Value and Feasibility of a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," p. 14.

vinced the “Germans desired to have a nuclear capability because of their territorial claims against Czechoslovakia and Poland.”¹⁹

Despite not wanting to embarrass a close ally, the United States also did not wish to see the FRG become a nuclear power. As Secretary of State Dean Rusk told Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, “The Germans should not have a national nuclear capability.”²⁰ Undersecretary of State Ball conceded, however, that preventing German nuclearization would be very hard if China’s test provoked widespread proliferation. But he also noted that it was not “safe to isolate Germany or leave it with a permanent sense of grievance,” an all-too-likely outcome from “her forced exclusion from the nuclear club.” Such policies, Ball remarked, “would provide a fertile ground for demagogues.”²¹

In sum, China’s ascension to the nuclear ranks threatened to weaken the United States’ position in Asia, unleash worldwide proliferation, and undermine geopolitical stability in the heart of Europe. U.S. grand strategy, oriented toward containing the Soviet Union largely through nuclear deterrence, appeared inapplicable to the dangers and dilemmas that these threats posed to the existing international order. For the Johnson administration, new policies, based on fresh thinking, were needed.

The Gilpatric Committee and Its Four Policy Options

Within a week of China’s atomic blast, President Johnson convened a meeting of his foreign policy advisers to discuss its consequences. The administration was surprised to learn that the PRC had exploded a U-235 device, not a plutonium weapon, as the Central Intelligence Agency had predicted. In a meeting with the president, CIA Director John McCone stated that the agency was “intensely reexamining all the evidence” to find how they had missed this key piece of information and to determine how the PRC had “obtained sufficient U-235.” In addition, he cautioned that the Chinese were “farther along” in “developing a nuclear capability” than the CIA had believed. The discussion turned quickly to the consequences of the atomic test for China’s military power, the worldwide proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the proposal to develop a multilateral force (MLF) in Europe.²² McCone asserted that although

19. “Disarmament Issues Discussed with Mikoyan,” undated, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 5, p. 2, USNA.

20. Record of Rusk-Khrushchev Meeting, August 8, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. 15, p. 567.

21. Memcon, Couve de Murville, Charles Lucet, George Ball, and Charles Bohlen, p. 2.

22. The MLF was a proposal, championed by the U.S. State Department, to develop a seaborne nuclear force that would be manned by any NATO country that wanted to participate. Robert Bowie

they had yet to do so, the “Germans probably possess sufficient nuclear technology to develop weapons” and could do so quickly if “the political situation so dictates.”²³

One week later, President Johnson commissioned a high-level group of “wise men,” led by Wall Street lawyer and former Undersecretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, to reexamine every aspect of U.S. nonproliferation policy and to predict the likely influence of China’s test on international politics.²⁴ Johnson asked the Gilpatric committee “to explore the widest range of measures that the United States might undertake in conjunction with other governments or by itself” to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.²⁵

The committee’s members included John McCloy; Arthur Dean, chairman of the U.S. delegation to the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament; former White House Science Adviser George Kistiakowsky; scientist and former Director of Defense Research and Engineering Herbert York; former CIA Director Allen Dulles; IBM Chairman Arthur Watson; and Gen. Alfred Gruenther, former military commander of NATO. The committee was supported by a strong senior staff that included Spurgeon Keeney of the NSC, who, according to Glen Seaborg, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), was a main drafter of the committee’s final report. Other staff members included Raymond Garthoff, Russell Murray, George Rathjens, and Henry Rowen. Harvard Law School professor Roger Fisher, among others, acted as outside consultants. In addition, the committee consulted widely with officials from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the NSC, the AEC, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA).

first proposed the concept in the last year of President Dwight Eisenhower’s administration, and different versions circulated with varying degrees of presidential support during the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies. While the United States would retain a veto over the firing of the weapons, the idea was to give the NATO allies—in particular, West Germany—a role in nuclear policy and even some limited access to the weapons. With the exception of the FRG, there was little enthusiasm for the proposal; the Soviet Union and France were adamantly opposed. Many State Department officials, however, feared that without the MLF, the West Germans would be unable to resist pressures to acquire their own nuclear forces. For an analysis of the MLF proposals, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 312–315.

23. Notes of President’s Meeting with Consultants on Foreign Policy, October 21, 1964, DDRS, document no. CK3100066700.

24. In a telephone conversation between National Security Adviser Bundy and Undersecretary State Ball on October 29, Bundy stated, “There was lots of feeling by the president that we should take a higher-level, harder look at the problem of nuclear spread—a better policy than we would be able to get by using our interhouse machinery. The thought has been expressed that a nuclear spread task force be established. He mentioned Ros Gilpatric in this regard.” Transcript of Conversation, McGeorge Bundy and George Ball, October 29, 1964, Personal Papers of George Ball, Disarmament, box 3, LBJL.

25. Seaborg, *Stemming the Tide*, p. 137.

The committee began by grouping the most vital proliferation policy issues into six categories. The first category dealt with proliferation in Europe, in particular, the contested issues of the MLF and German nuclearization. The second concerned proliferation beyond Europe, especially in India and Japan but also in the Middle East. The third involved U.S. policy toward existing nuclear powers and included the question of whether Great Britain could be convinced to abandon its nuclear program and whether China's and France's nuclear programs could be rolled back. The final three issues—U.S. nuclear weapons policies; the peaceful uses of atomic energy; and safeguards, inspections, and technology transfer—fell into more technical categories.

The committee then identified four broad policy options. Option one, "permissive or selective proliferation," assumed that proliferation was inevitable, and that in some cases, the United States might benefit by facilitating the process. As one analyst asked at the time, "[Was] it [in] the U.S. interest in all cases" to prevent other countries from obtaining nuclear weapons, "or might it be in the U.S. interest for particular nations to acquire such capability?"²⁶ If India and Japan were determined to develop nuclear capabilities in response to the Chinese test, then the United States might win their favor by offering them assistance with their programs. At the other extreme, option four called for an "all-out" effort to prevent proliferation and would make it the most important foreign policy goal of the United States. The logic underpinning this option was that the short-term costs of an all-out strategy, which would include angering close U.S. allies, was justified to avoid the long-term costs of a world with dozens of nuclear powers. Option two, also referred to as the "prudent course," advised the United States to take steps to slow proliferation, but only if they did not involve major risks or sacrifice other U.S. interests. Ultimately, the United States would have to "learn to live" with the consequences of nuclear proliferation. The third option envisaged U.S. acceptance of "substantial costs and risks" to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. It did not, however, go as far as option four.²⁷

All four options had consequences for existing U.S. Cold War policy. Option one would end U.S. attempts to police the world. Countries such as India, Indonesia, Japan, and Pakistan could pursue a nuclear capability, as could Australia (with British help), Brazil, and even Mexico. Israel and Egypt could push

26. "Selected Issues," author and date unknown, NSF, Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 5, p. 1, LBJL.

27. "Problems Concerning Alternative Courses of Action," author and date unknown, Personal Papers of Roswell Gilpatric (hereafter cited as PPRG), box 11, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as JFKL).

forward with their atomic efforts unimpeded. Proliferation on this scale could eventually lead to the withdrawal of U.S. (and Soviet) forces from regions populated with new nuclear powers. Under option one, the nuclear arming of the PRC would lead to "the U.S. departure from Southeast Asia," which would then "fall under Chicom [Communist China] hegemony." Western Europe would integrate politically and militarily, possibly forcing U.S. withdrawal from the continent. Although the danger of nuclear war might increase, the Gilpatric committee speculated that it was "conceivable new regional groupings and balances, coupled with the responsibility which may come with nuclear accession, may create a new stability."²⁸ Option one was *realpolitik* in its purest form.

Option four would also carry profound geopolitical consequences. To prevent non-European countries such as India and Japan from developing nuclear weapons, the United States would need to offer "really serious guarantees and deployments to back them up," including U.S. nuclear weapons. If that did not work, Washington would have to resort to "bribes" and "threats of economic and military abandonment." Egypt and Israel, for example, would be treated in a "brutal" manner if they sought a nuclear capability.²⁹ Option four also considered the possibility of nuclear rollback. The United States might use military force to eliminate China's nuclear capability; failing that, an all-out effort could be made to win Chinese cooperation through appeasement, including United Nations membership and promises of trade and territory. France, on the other hand, would be expelled from NATO and the Common Market and treated "like Cuba" if it did not acquiesce to U.S. nonproliferation policies.³⁰ Roger Fisher, special consultant to the Gilpatric committee, suggested the adoption of more "vigorous measures against French testing," including "covert operations" against France's nuclear facilities. According to Fisher, the United States could always call on Indonesia's President Sukarno, with help from Australia, to "undertake some dirty work" to undermine the French nuclear program, thus allowing the United States to avoid "a major war with France."³¹

28. "Probable Consequences: Permissive or Selective Proliferation," author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL; and "Permissive or Selective Proliferation," author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

29. "All-Out Efforts to Stop Proliferation," author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL; and "Probable Consequences: All-Out Efforts to Stop Proliferation," author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Roger Fisher, "Memo on Possible Action: Action Directed against Further French Atmospheric Tests," December 19, 1964, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

U.S. pursuit of option four had the potential to transform power politics in Europe. The MLF proposal would be dropped, and West Germany, faced “with [the] threat of U.S. security withdrawal,” would be forced to remain non-nuclear. If Bonn resisted this pressure, Washington would push “hard for a European settlement” that included the removal of a “neutral” and reunified Germany from NATO and the establishment of a nuclear-free zone for Central Europe. This fundamental shift might “make Europe look safer and perhaps loosen Soviet ties to satellites.” But if a reunified Germany ever remilitarized, “[it] would pose a serious threat to [the] Soviets (and West).” The Soviets “might try to step in, precipitating large-scale conflict.”³²

Aspects of option one and option four found support from members of the Gilpatric committee. Both options, however, contained elements that were fraught with uncertainty and danger. The policy the United States was pursuing, however—option two (i.e., continuation of the “prudent course”)—was seen as deeply flawed. Under this option, the United States would continue to pursue nonproliferation efforts that could be made “without substantial cost.”³³ Discussions to create an MLF in Europe would proceed, but “with hints of [a] U.S. continued veto.” The United States would remain “ambivalent” about a European deterrent, leaving “open” the idea of trading the MLF for German reunification, but in the end avoid a confrontation with the FRG. Because the United States would not make any specific military commitments, it would be hard to “stop India, Israel, Japan, and other Nth nations” from developing nuclear weapons. The United States would still be “forced to withdraw from Southeast Asia,” but at a higher cost than assumed in option one.³⁴

This left option three, which went well beyond option two in its recommendation that the United States should accept substantial costs and risks, short of nuclear rollback, to stem proliferation. According to this option, the effort to establish an MLF in Europe would have to be dropped, a move that would be sure to anger West Germany. France, meanwhile, would be irritated by increased U.S. efforts to stop worldwide nuclear testing. In addition, the administration would have to strengthen U.S. guarantees to Japan, as well as consider making promises to protect India. Despite the significant shift these changes would entail, U.S. expectations were, in some cases, modest. According to one assessment, “U.S. pressure and slowed proliferation elsewhere

32. “Probable Consequences: All-Out Efforts to Stop Proliferation.”

33. “Present ‘Prudent’ Course,” author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

34. “Present ‘Prudent’ Course,” author and date unknown (same title but different document from that cited in n. 33), PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

would keep [the] FRG in line for an extra 5–10 years (and perhaps longer).” If India remained nonnuclear, “other nations might be kept in line,” and nuclear weapons acquisition might be delayed “at least 5–10 years.” On the other hand, adoption of option three might “delay Israel/UAR [United Arab Republic] acquisition indefinitely,” with similar results for Japan. Africa, save for South Africa, would become a nuclear-free zone.³⁵

The most important aspect of option three was its potential to facilitate the emerging détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. Neither the Americans nor the Soviets alone could halt proliferation, but “both ha[d] much to lose” if “lesser powers” acquired nuclear capabilities. The Soviet Union could face “simultaneous encirclement by [a] nuclear-armed China and Germany” and thus had a “vital interest” in reaching a “limited détente that could neutralize one or both threats.” At the same time, the United States needed “to find ways to strengthen its deterrence of China and to maintain stable behavior in Western Europe.” Both superpowers could benefit “from a lessening of ideological competition and national involvement in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and perhaps Latin America.” These “multiple, overlapping interests” suggested the “timeliness of early steps to achieve an essentially bi-polar entente, resembling the Concert of Europe, the informal coalition based on limited mutuality of interests that kept the peace in Europe for more than half of the nineteenth century.”³⁶ This opened up the possibility that a “European settlement and German reunification” could be achieved.³⁷ Only two years had elapsed since the Cuban missile crisis, yet some policymakers believed that U.S. and Soviet interests were converging around the question of nuclear proliferation, which in turn could lead to greater bilateral cooperation on a variety of other geopolitical issues.

Bureaucratic Battles over Proliferation Policy

The Gilpatric committee quickly discovered that the government’s bureaucracies were deeply divided over the direction of U.S. nonproliferation policy. ACDA, for example, argued that preventing the spread of nuclear weapons was more important than almost any other U.S. foreign policy goal. The State Department, on the other hand, did not want to threaten important U.S.

35. “Course III,” author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

36. “A Comparable Rationale for Course III (and Beyond),” author and date unknown, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

37. “Probable Consequences,” author and date unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

interests, such as relations with West Germany and Japan, to achieve non-proliferation. And while ACDA thought that a comprehensive nonproliferation policy would be most effective, the State Department wanted to tackle the issue on a country-by-country basis.

To better understand the different positions within the government, the Gilpatric committee organized a series of staff briefings and interviews with high-level political and military officials to solicit their views. At his briefing, the head of ACDA, William Foster, was the most supportive of the committee's mandate. Foster emphasized the urgency of the nuclear proliferation problem created by China's atomic test and disagreed that proliferation could be slowed after India and Japan developed the bomb, as articulated in option two. He also suggested that the Soviet Union would join the United States in signing and promoting a worldwide "non-dissemination non-acquisition" agreement if it were not for the MLF proposal. Finally, he argued that the United States and the Soviet Union would need to limit their own nuclear programs because "it was unrealistic to expect to control proliferation as long as the great powers continued a nuclear arms race."³⁸

Undersecretary of State Ball took a far different approach in his committee briefing. Although "non-committal" on the "prospects of deterring India and Japan from 'going nuclear,'" Ball did not think that a U.S.-Soviet nonproliferation pact would influence their decisions. Instead he proposed making available a "pool of nuclear weapons which could be drawn upon by India or Japan for use by their dual purpose delivery vehicles." Ball vehemently disagreed with the idea that the MLF proposal should be dropped, and he did not want the Johnson administration to give in to French and Soviet pressure on this issue. The MLF, according to Ball, would not make the U.S. goals of nonproliferation or German reunification more difficult. As he stated at the time, "We cannot make the Germans into second-class citizens. We cannot subject them to a discriminatory state of original sin."³⁹

In his appearance before the committee, Secretary of State Rusk also cautioned against changing U.S. nonproliferation policy. Rusk argued that it "was easy for the U.S. to speak out against proliferation, but the Prime Minister of India or Japan must look on the question quite differently." The West German ambassador to the United States had told him that his country would withhold support for U.S. nonproliferation efforts "as a bargaining counter for reuni-

38. "Minutes of Briefing by Hon. Wm. C. Foster to Gilpatric Committee on January 7, 1965," January 7, 1965, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

39. "RLG's Notes on Luncheon Conf. with George Ball," December 14, 1964, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

fication." When CIA Director Dulles asked Rusk if the United States should make a "big effort, with many kinds of measures" to achieve nonproliferation, Rusk replied no. The United States had not been able to prevent France from developing nuclear weapons and had "not struck China to deal with its nuclear program." In addition, India was probably already working "on the first stages of preparations for nuclear weapons," and there was little the United States could do about it. For Rusk, "nonproliferation [was] not the overriding element in U.S. relations with the rest of the world."⁴⁰

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was sympathetic to the goals of both ACDA and the Department of State. Although offering only lukewarm support for the MLF, McNamara believed that President Johnson could overcome congressional opposition to its creation in the same way President Kennedy won over Congress on the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963. McNamara opposed "national" proliferation, but he believed that "starting with Australia and the Philippines," a collective nuclear organization should be created for East Asia. Perhaps most surprising, McNamara also suggested that the development of an "ABM [antiballistic missile system] might make sense" if the system were "thinly and broadly deployed" against the rising Chinese threat. His overriding objective, however, was bilateral arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, a concern beyond the scope of the Gilpatric committee's mandate.⁴¹

In sum, the briefings exposed deep differences within the U.S. government on the issue of nonproliferation. According to the head of policy planning, Walt Rostow, the State Department still believed that a country's decision to develop nuclear weapons emerged from "a complex politico-military calculus at the highest and most sensitive levels" and that nonproliferation would succeed only if the United States examined "the specific factors which affect that calculus in different capitals and operate directly upon them."⁴² The arms control professionals disagreed: "It should be a prime objective of U.S. policy in all cases to prevent the acquisition by other countries of an independent nuclear capability. To make exceptions in special cases would frustrate the entire objective of such a policy." Therefore, if "Japan is to be treated as a special case, it is hard to believe that Germany and Italy would" remain nonnuclear.⁴³

40. "Secretary's Meeting with the Gilpatric Committee on Non-Proliferation," January 7, 1965, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 24, p. 4, USNA.

41. "Notes on RLG's Talk with RS McN," December 12, 1964, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

42. Walt W. Rostow, "A Way of Thinking About Nuclear Proliferation," November 19, 1964, PPRG, box 11, JFKL, p. 1.

43. "Tentative Thoughts on Certain Proliferation Problems," author and date unknown, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

Obstacles to a New U.S. Nonproliferation Strategy

The nuclearization of international politics gave rise to a number of puzzles and dilemmas that the Gilpatric committee had to address in its proceedings. The question before the committee went well beyond whether the United States had a right to dictate to other states how they should deal with their security. At the very time that U.S. policymakers had concluded that nuclear weapons were unusable, and therefore had little military or political value, the U.S. government was devoting tremendous energy to preventing other nations from acquiring them. The more effort the United States made to halt proliferation, the more political capital it spent, the more attractive these weapons must have seemed to smaller powers. If a single atomic detonation by China, a country with no conceivable means of delivery and decades away from a secure second-strike force, could provoke grave concern and prompt a shift in policy from the world's most powerful country, the U.S. government would have great difficulty convincing others that these weapons had no political utility.

The Gilpatric committee wrestled with the following dilemmas when deliberating its policy recommendations: should the United States appease or punish potential nuclear states? Should it employ the same nonproliferation standards to all states, or should U.S. policy allow that, in some cases, proliferation was justified? Was the United States wise in undertaking new security commitments to dampen proliferation? Should U.S. strategy be transformed to de-emphasize the use of nuclear weapons? Would missile defenses deter or encourage proliferation? And how would the escalating conflict in Vietnam affect the committee's recommendations?

APPEASEMENT VERSUS PUNISHMENT

In deciding on its response to China's atomic test, the Johnson administration considered two options: (1) appeasement, which could include offering the PRC an assortment of economic and political incentives, such as UN membership, if it stopped its testing; and (2) threats of force. While some in the administration urged a preemptive strike, others wanted to "explore what we need to [do to] bring the Chinese Communists into a nuclear *détente*" similar to that achieved with the Soviets.⁴⁴ In some cases, both options were recommended. One briefing paper insisted that the United States had to either "keep China

44. Notes of AHD to RG, JJM, and AW Jr., December 13, 1964, NSF, Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 1, p. 2, LBJL.

permanently out of business or induce her to behave responsibly.”⁴⁵ Another document noted that worldwide nonproliferation would be difficult to achieve unless the United States either eliminated China’s “nuclear-strategic capabilities and keep them eliminated” or succeeded “in persuading China to cooperate responsibly in arms control measures.” As the document’s author noted, however, the choice was hardly satisfactory: “The latter program looks improbable; the former program is burdened with major risks; and the two are mutually inconsistent.”⁴⁶

U.S. threats to use force against a state that developed a nuclear weapons program furnished that state with a great incentive to acquire the bomb, if only to protect itself from U.S. pressure. Appeasement, however, was unlikely to work with a state that was determined to develop nuclear weapons. George W. Bush’s administration has had to confront this same dilemma, as it pursues policies ranging from preventive war to accommodation in its dealings with Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Pakistan.

BLANKET VERSUS CASE-BY-CASE APPLICATION

Another challenge the United States had to address was distinguishing among the ambitions and abilities of various potential nuclear powers. Should the United States apply its nonproliferation policy across the board, or should it examine states’ nuclear programs on a case-by-case basis? Sweden was a stable, democratic, status quo power that wanted atomic weapons purely as a deterrent. Should it be prevented from acquiring such a capability? As for countries in East Asia, Secretary of State Rusk doubted that a blanket nonproliferation policy made sense, given the region’s high security needs. Rusk wondered, “Should it always be the U.S. which would have to use nuclear weapons against Red China? He could conceive of situations where the Japanese or Indians might desirably have their own nuclear weapons.”⁴⁷

Japan was a particularly complex case. In the fall of 1964, U.S. intelligence warned the Johnson administration that Japan’s incoming prime minister, Sato Eisaku, and foreign minister, Etsusaburo Shiina, were “hot for proliferation.”⁴⁸

45. “Probable Consequences IV: All-Out Efforts to Stop Proliferation,” undated and author unknown, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

46. “Problems Concerning Alternative Courses of Action,” p. 4.

47. Memcon, “Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons—Course of Action for UNGA—Discussed by the Committee of Principals,” November 23, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964–1968, Vol. 11: *Arms Control and Disarmament* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, n.d.), document no. 50, http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xi/f.html.

48. Memorandum, RWK to McGeorge Bundy, October 26, 1964, NSF, Subject File, Nuclear Weapons, box 34, LBJL.

In 1965 the prime minister told President Johnson that “nuclear weapons in Japan just make sense.”⁴⁹ He “personally felt that if the Chicoms had nuclear weapons, the Japanese should have them” as well.⁵⁰ A U.S. assessment of Japan’s nuclear capabilities suggested that Japan could “test its first nuclear device as early as 1971” and produce “as many as 100 nuclear-equipped MRBM/IRBMs [medium-range ballistic missiles/intermediate-range ballistic missiles] by 1975.” Indeed Japan’s capacity to build nuclear weapons was “a near certainty.” Even more worrying, recent indications were “discouraging with respect to [the] Japanese leadership or even support of a nonproliferation agreement.”⁵¹

Similar pressures also existed in India, with some U.S. policymakers having already expressed sympathy with the Indians’ efforts to address their security concerns. As early as 1961, State Department official George McGhee suggested “that it would be desirable if a friendly Asian power beat Communist China to the punch” by testing a nuclear device first, and there was “no likelier candidate than India.”⁵² McGhee noted, however, that if India developed nuclear weapons, it could unleash “a chain reaction of similar decisions by other countries, such as Pakistan, Israel, and the United Arab Republic. In these circumstances, it is unrealistic to hope that Germany and other European nations would not decide their own nuclear weapons [*sic*].”⁵³

The Johnson administration therefore understood that granting exceptions to Sweden and India, although understandable, would weaken the effort to prevent West Germany from acquiring atomic weapons. This puzzle applied to whole regions: while many saw the MLF as aiding proliferation in Europe, similar collective multilateral nuclear solutions were seen as a way to prevent proliferation in East Asia.

NEW U.S. SECURITY COMMITMENTS

Another dilemma involved whether to extend new U.S. security commitments to certain states and concern over the effect such offers could have on U.S. nu-

49. Memorandum, Dean Rusk to President Johnson, January 1965, NSF, Country File, Japan, box 253, 1 of 2, LBJL.

50. Memorandum of Conversation, PM Sato and President Johnson, January 1965, NSF, Country File, Japan, box 253, 1 of 2, LBJL.

51. “Japan’s Prospects in the Nuclear Weapons Field: Proposed U.S. Courses of Action,” June 24, 1965, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 24, USNA.

52. Memorandum, George McGhee to Dean Rusk, September 13, 1961, Freedom of Information Act Files, India, USNA.

53. Position Paper, author unknown, “A Report to the President by the Committee on Nuclear Proliferation,” January 21, 1965, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

clear strategy. To convince countries to abandon their nuclear programs, the United States would have to guarantee their protection under its extended nuclear umbrella. But an extended deterrent strategy worked best if the United States maintained both nuclear superiority and a willingness to use atomic weapons, factors that would both accelerate the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union and undermine global nonproliferation efforts. This dilemma clouded the debate in Washington over the role of nuclear weapons in the defense of Europe. Gilpatric committee consultant Roger Fisher argued that so "long as the NATO powers behave as though the operation of a nuclear deterrent was the most important problem in the world, other countries will be influenced in a nuclear direction."⁵⁴

The case of India highlighted the extraordinary challenges in linking U.S. security commitments with the pledge not to proliferate. If India were truly threatened, only an explicit U.S. commitment to come to its defense, backed by deployed forces, would convince New Delhi to forswear the acquisition of nuclear weapons. The Johnson administration, however, did not want to assume the risks associated with such a commitment. According to Llewellyn Thompson, a former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union and trusted presidential adviser, "It is doubtful that a country which feels really threatened and is capable of building nuclear weapons will indefinitely refrain from doing so merely in exchange for general or conditional guarantees. I would not like to see 100 million American lives placed in escrow for renewed hostilities in Ladakh, at some distant time when the Chinese might have reestablished an effective military alliance with the Soviet Union."⁵⁵

New security commitments could also threaten existing relationships. Here again, India epitomized the administration's dilemma. William Bundy, a senior adviser to President Johnson, cautioned that "any parallel or joint assurances to India involving the U.S. and the USSR would strongly tempt Japan to move towards a nonaligned position" (i.e., away from the United States). Bundy went on to warn that if such a strong security commitment were extended to a country—India—that had not made the painful choice of choosing sides in the Cold War struggle, it might "undercut our relationships with our allies."⁵⁶ Similarly, if the United States made commitments to every nonnuclear

54. "Professor Roger Fisher's Comments on Selected Portions of Course Three," n.d., NSF, Committee on Non-Proliferation, box 5, p. 1, LBJL.

55. Thompson for Rusk, "Talking Points for Meeting with the Gilpatric Committee," January 7, 1965, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 24, USNA.

56. William Bundy to Ambassador Thompson, "Nuclear Assurances to India," March 16, 1965, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 24, USNA.

power, its credibility might be challenged. As McCloy pointed out, "The character of our determination will be diluted if we have 20 such commitments and our fundamental image of capability to defend the free world might be impaired."⁵⁷

ARMS CONTROL AND NO FIRST USE

A growing international demand that the United States reduce its own nuclear arsenal posed yet another dilemma for the Johnson administration. Although the shrinking of U.S. strategic force levels would be a "great power quid pro" in efforts to convince smaller powers to embrace "nuclear denial," administration officials worried that a smaller strategic force would weaken the United States' extended deterrent and "make it easier" for a small country to become a "first-rank nuclear power."⁵⁸ To prevent Japan from acquiring nuclear weapons, for example, the administration had to "maintain a clearly superior U.S. nuclear capability in Asia."⁵⁹ In Europe, "repeated statements by responsible Americans from the President on down about the catastrophic consequences . . . of a U.S.-Soviet nuclear exchange," combined with a new emphasis on "conventional response[s]," only strengthened "European doubts about the credibility of our willingness to risk our destruction by using nuclear weapons." Some within the administration feared that a U.S. denuclearization of Europe could "create the need for European independent capabilities."⁶⁰

Another dilemma confronting the administration was whether to adopt a no-first-use nuclear strategy. Nonproliferation advocates hoped that the declaration of such a policy would demonstrate to the world the U.S. position that nuclear weapons were unusable and therefore worthless. Moreover, as long as the U.S. government continued to emphasize "nuclear weapons and nuclear superiority" and promised a nuclear response to a Soviet conventional attack, the United States was "teaching the world" that "nuclear weapons are 'superior' to the [nonnuclear] weapons they have," thereby strengthening "national incentives for acquiring nuclear weapons."⁶¹ A no-first-use strategy, however, would weaken U.S. security guarantees in the face of the Soviet Union's conventional force superiority. A background paper on the possibility of Japanese

57. *Ibid.*

58. "Problems Concerning Alternative Courses of Action," p. 3.

59. "Japan's Prospects in the Nuclear Weapons Field," p. 12.

60. "Europe, NATO, Germany, and the MLF," author and date unknown, NSF, Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, box 1, p. 5, LBJL.

61. Fisher to Gilpatric, "A Proposed Decision on the General U.S. Policy toward Nuclear Weapons," December 17, 1964, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

acquisition of nuclear weapons argued that “a manifestly effective U.S. nuclear ‘umbrella’ will obviate the need for Japan to create a nuclear force on its own. The doubts which may arise over the U.S. deterrent will not involve its strength, but rather our willingness to use it in defense of Japan.”⁶²

PROLIFERATION AND MISSILE DEFENSE

The Johnson administration considered construction of an ABM system for each of the four options outlined by the Gilpatric committee.⁶³ Papers prepared by supporters of option one—that is, permissive or selective proliferation—recommended building up a “damage-limiting capability, including ABMs.”⁶⁴ A similar recommendation was made regarding option two, the so-called prudent option.⁶⁵ The option three paper recommended that the administration “continue development of ABM for possible use against limited threats.”⁶⁶ Defense Secretary McNamara, who would later become a fierce opponent of missile defense, argued that “ABM might make sense for [the] U.S. if thinly and broadly deployed.”⁶⁷ At one point, an outside expert even suggested that the United States should work “in concert with the USSR” to “deploy ABM systems which might be effective against minor powers.”⁶⁸

Missile defenses, however, could have complex and contradictory effects on nuclear proliferation—a fact rarely noted today. On the one hand, a light ABM system might be useful against weaker states, raising the bar to becoming an effective nuclear state too high for all but the greatest powers to clear. According to this argument, the deployment of an ABM system by the United States would “decrease U.S. vulnerabilities to possible Chinese threats of attack and thereby enhance the credibility of our [U.S.] commitments to Japan and other friendly nations.”⁶⁹ An ABM system would be an “alternative to expensive”

62. “Background Paper on Factors Which Could Influence National Decisions Concerning Acquisition of Nuclear Weapons,” Department of State, December 12, 1964, RG 59, lot 68D452, book 199, pp. 14–15, USNA.

63. The Johnson administration made the decision to deploy a “light” system in December 1966. (A light system could be oriented against small nuclear powers or accidental missile launches from the Soviet Union. In contrast, a full-scale system could counter a full-scale Soviet attack.) Secretary of Defense McNamara announced the controversial decision in a speech in San Francisco in September 1967. McNamara justified the deployment by emphasizing the Chinese, not Soviet, threat.

64. “Probable Consequences: Permissive or Selective Proliferation.”

65. “Present ‘Prudent’ Course,” PPRG, box 11, JFKL (same document as cited in n. 34 above).

66. “Course III.”

67. “Handwritten Notes on RLC’s Talk with RS McN,” December 12, 1964, PPRG, box 11, JFKL.

68. Gerald W. Johnson, associate director of Plowshare, to Gilpatric, December 7, 1964, PPRG, box 10, JFKL.

69. “Contingency Paper on the Arms Control Considerations of a U.S. ABM Deployment Decision,” August 25, 1967, NSF, Country File: USSR, box 231, folder: USSR-ABM Negotiations (II) 1/67–9/68, LBJL.

security “guarantees to discourage Nth country” proliferation.⁷⁰ It could also enhance a strategy of nuclear superiority and the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence guarantees to nonnuclear powers.

Arguments against U.S. deployment of an ABM system cautioned that it could encourage proliferation by protecting the United States while leaving vulnerable unprotected nonnuclear powers. A West German government official, for example, told a U.S. delegation that “the establishing of ABM systems in the Soviet Union and the United States, [would leave] Europe ‘naked in the cold’, [and] constitutes a reason for [membership] withdrawal” from a nonproliferation treaty.⁷¹ Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoliy Dobrynin argued that it would be impossible to convince states “to sign a nonproliferation agreement if they saw the U.S. and USSR entering another major round of [the] arms race [implying the development of ABM systems on both sides].”⁷² Furthermore, the message that nuclear weapons were “useless” would be undermined if the United States responded to proliferation by “minor powers” by deploying a technologically sophisticated, multibillion-dollar defense system. In the view of some Johnson administration officials, if the United States built an ABM system because of the nuclear threat posed by China, other nations would wonder why “we [would] consider undertaking a massive expansion of our strategic defensive forces in the face of a relatively weak Chinese threat when we have not chosen to do so against our much stronger Soviet opponent.”⁷³ Deploying an ABM system against the Chinese would greatly magnify the image of China’s military power, possibly inducing India and Japan to seek heavily subsidized ABM systems of their own.⁷⁴

Finally, the ABM issue could expose contradictions between two initiatives with the same ostensible goal: achieving both a nonproliferation and a comprehensive test ban treaty. One of the arguments against a complete test ban treaty was that it could “inhibit the development of ABMs and other devices which could afford a successful defense against second-class nuclear capabilities.”⁷⁵

70. Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, Minutes of Discussion, December 13–14, 1965, NSF, Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, p. 7, LBJL.

71. Notes of Ministerial Director Diehl, February 1, 1967, document no. 40, p. 213.

72. Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoliy F. Dobrynin and President’s Special Assistant Walt W. Rostow, Memo of Conversation, January 27, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964–1968, Vol. 14, p. 455.

73. Strategic Military Panel, President’s Science Advisory Committee, “Proposed Army-BTL Ballistic Missile Defense System,” October 29, 1965, <http://www.gwu.edu/?nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB36/01-01.htm>.

74. Spurgeon Keeny to Dr. Donald F. Hornig, “ABM Deployment,” January 4, 1967, DDRS, document no. CK3100183292.

75. Murray, “Problems of Nuclear Proliferation outside Europe,” p. 7.

THE CREDIBILITY CONUNDRUM IN PRACTICE—PROLIFERATION AND VIETNAM

The dilemmas associated with nuclear proliferation influenced U.S. military strategy throughout the world, most obviously in Europe. But a linkage also existed between a more active nonproliferation policy and the U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia. The Gilpatric committee discussions took place when the Johnson administration was debating whether to escalate U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. China's atomic test was bound to influence these discussions. President Kennedy had considered a nuclear-armed China a grave threat that would "so upset the world political scene [that] it would be intolerable."⁷⁶ Convinced that China was "bound to get nuclear weapons, in time, and from that moment on they will dominate South East Asia," Kennedy feared that even a minimal Chinese nuclear force could prevent U.S. military intervention. As Kennedy had once noted, just a few missiles in Cuba had "had a deterrent affect on us."⁷⁷

President Kennedy's analysis implied that once China acquired a nuclear capability, the United States would likely withdraw from Vietnam. In fact, the Gilpatric committee's option one policy envisioned a U.S. withdrawal once India and Japan developed nuclear weapons (with U.S. help). But government officials, as well as members of the committee, wanted to make clear that the United States would not break its commitments in the face of a nuclear threat. If the United States acquiesced to a nuclear-armed adversary, the incentives for small powers to develop nuclear weapons would increase exponentially. Vietnam would be the test case of this new commitment. In a paper for the Gilpatric committee, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Henry Rowen wrote, "A U.S. defeat in Southeast Asia may come to be attributed in part to the unwillingness of the U.S. to take on North Vietnam supported by a China that now has the bomb. Such a defeat is now much more significant to countries near China than it was before October 16."⁷⁸

In a memorandum dated November 4, 1964, Policy Planning Chief Rostow laid out the argument in greater detail. As he saw it, dealing successfully with nuclear proliferation "hinge[d] greatly on the outcome of the crises in Southeast Asia and in the Atlantic Community." If the administration could make "U.S. military power sufficiently relevant to the situation in South-east Asia,"

76. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle,'" p. 67.

77. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, p. 320.

78. Henry Rowen, "Effects of Chinese Bomb on Nuclear Spread," November 2, 1964, RG 59, lot 70D 199, p. 6, USNA.

the "impulse in India and Japan to go forward will be substantially diminished or postponed." If there was a stalemate or a setback in Southeast Asia, the impulse in India and Japan to move toward some national form of deterrence would be enhanced.⁷⁹ Two weeks later, Rostow again made the connection to the Gilpatric committee: "Can we enhance [India's and Japan's] sense of confidence in the relevance of U.S. military power as an effective check on Chinese Communist expansion?"⁸⁰

The commitment to maintain U.S. security agreements with countries facing a nuclear threat was also included in the first official presidential statement issued after the Chinese detonation. In the statement, President Johnson declared, "The United States reaffirms its defense commitments in Asia. Even if Communist China should eventually develop an effective nuclear capability, that capability would have no effect on the readiness of the United States to respond to requests from Asian nations for help in dealing with Communist Chinese aggression. The United States will also not be diverted from its efforts to help the nations of Asia to defend themselves and to advance the welfare of their people."⁸¹

This logic demonstrated perhaps the biggest dilemma of making security policy in the nuclear age: the United States needed to fight a conventional war in an area of little strategic interest (Vietnam), during a period of détente and cooperation with its main adversary (the Soviet Union), to convince an ally (Japan) and a neutral state (India) not to develop nuclear weapons, because if they did, the pressures on West Germany would mount, tensions with the Soviets would escalate, and détente would be undermined.

Some analysts even hoped that a new U.S. nonproliferation policy might deter China from intervening in Vietnam. Discussing a proposal to ban the use of atomic weapons against nonnuclear states, analysts argued that a nonproliferation agreement could "underscore the exposed position" of China. According to this view, "By becoming a nuclear power it [China] has destroyed—or at least substantially reduced—the political inhibitions which have existed against using nuclear weapons against it."⁸² In an obvious case of wishful thinking, the proposal's authors asserted that a ban on the use of nuclear

79. Memo, Rostow to Rusk, "Nuclear Proliferation and the Crises in South-east Asia and the Atlantic," November 4, 1964, RG 59, lot 70D 199, p. 1, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

80. Rostow, "A Way of Thinking About Nuclear Proliferation," p. 15.

81. "Statement by the President on Chinese Communist Detonation of Nuclear Devices," October 16, 1964, RG 59, lot 70D, book 199, p. 1, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

82. "Position Paper on a Non-Proliferation Agreement," July 16, 1965, DDRS, document no. CK3100079658, p. 11.

weapons against nonnuclear states could “increase the reluctance of ‘national liberation forces’ in various countries of Asia to see Communist Chinese forces involved with them since [this] would mean exposure to the American nuclear arsenal.”⁸³ More astute analysts such as Thomas Hughes, the director of intelligence and research at the Department of State, recognized, however, that the United States would be deterred from using nuclear weapons against China regardless of the latter’s atomic capabilities. In the end, Mao’s view that “the U.S. is actually deterred from the use of nuclear weapons by world opinion and possible Soviet retaliation” proved correct.⁸⁴

“Concessions from the Wrong Side and to the Wrong Address”

The greatest challenge to a proposed shift in U.S. nonproliferation strategy was that it would require the help of an enemy, the Soviet Union, to hinder allies such as France, Japan, and particularly West Germany in their efforts to build nuclear capabilities. A worldwide nonproliferation effort signaled an easing of Cold War tensions and emerging cooperation between the superpowers. Japan, and especially West Germany, had to be concerned that their basic national interests, to say nothing of any nuclear ambitions, would be sacrificed on the altar of bipolar détente. Because of their unresolved geopolitical conflicts with the Soviet Union, a U.S. effort to achieve a nonproliferation agreement with Russia might unleash powerful incentives for both countries to acquire nuclear weapons.

One of the most outspoken critics of this proposed shift was John McCloy. It was “fantastic,” McCloy argued, to think that the problem “of European security is solvable by the ‘other side.’” Sacrificing West German interests to win Soviet approval, McCloy asserted, risked “losing both the Alliance and nonproliferation.” It was this type of thinking, he averred, that “opened the door to German insecurity in the 1920s.”⁸⁵ In a stinging letter of rebuke addressed to Chairman Gilpatric, McCloy disputed the notion that “a world in which there was a proliferation of nuclear weapons” was a disaster, particularly considering the “price we [the United States] might be willing to pay” to

83. Ibid., p. 13.

84. Thomas Hughes to Acting Secretary, “Communist China: Lo Jui-ch’ing on War—Nuclear and Conventional,” May 13, 1965, DDRS, document no. CK 3100363074.

85. Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, Minutes of Discussion, Third Meeting, January 7–8, 1965, PPRG, box 10, JFKL. In the LBJ Library’s copy of this document, the last line (and much else) has been redacted.

achieve it. McCloy argued that sacrificing the MLF to appease the Soviet Union would incur risks that were "at least equal, if they do not exceed," the risks of proliferation. Taking the attitude that "we owe nothing to the Germans and 'to hell with them anyway,'" he warned, threatened a return to the dangerous instability of the interwar period. McCloy reminded Gilpatric, "Germany has been allied with Russia before and if Germany cannot find a solid berth as a member of a Western partnership, she might try again."⁸⁶

This struggle emerged from an even larger issue: whether the most fundamental question of the Cold War—the political and military status of Germany—had become less worrisome than the potential consequences of widespread nuclear proliferation. McCloy's position was clear: "We can talk and speculate about the effects of India having the bomb, or Israel, the U.A.R., or Pakistan, but these effects are less ominous compared with those which would flow from further acquisition of nuclear power in Europe." National nuclear deterrents in Europe were "more dangerous than proliferation in Asia, considering the past history of Europe."⁸⁷ Supporters of the MLF within the Johnson administration agreed. Undersecretary of State Ball told the British defense minister and foreign secretary, "We should avoid making concessions in European policy in an effort to accomplish solutions to Asian problems, only to find these solutions ineffective."⁸⁸

As the Gilpatric committee's recommendations moved closer to becoming U.S. policy, McCloy warned of the consequences. Writing to Senator John Pastore, an ardent supporter of a nonproliferation treaty, McCloy asked, "Why should we make any concessions in respect of our security or that of our allies for a nonproliferation agreement (of doubtful efficacy at best) when we know the Soviets are no more disposed to proliferate their nuclear weapons or 'know how,' particularly after their Chinese experience, than we are or indeed anyone else is who has the weapon?"⁸⁹ After watching a television debate between Senator Robert Kennedy and West European officials, McCloy wrote, "Proliferation will certainly increase the chances of a nuclear disaster, but I think it is an

86. McCloy to Gilpatric, Cover Letter and "Memorandum for the Chairman," January 11, 1965, box DA1, folder 87, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

87. "London Meeting of McNamara and Ball with Secretary of State for Defence Denis Healy and Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart," November 26, 1965, RG 59, box 1592, Defe 18-3, p. 5, USNA.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Letter, McCloy to Pastore, February 28, 1966, box DA1, folder 108, p. 1, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts. China had been an ally of the Soviet Union but was now an adversary. The change from friend to foe caused the Soviet leadership to regret any assistance the Soviets had provided to China's nuclear program.

oversimplification to associate all evil with proliferation and all good with nonproliferation.”⁹⁰ Kennedy, who had seized on the nonproliferation issue in the Senate, responded that although there were risks in placating the Soviet Union’s “morbid fear of nuclear weapons being shared with Germany in any way,” a nonproliferation treaty was necessary to encourage “nations like India, Israel, Sweden and others to abstain from developing nuclear weapons themselves.”⁹¹

McCloy’s stature led nonproliferation skeptics both inside and outside the administration to seek him out. State Department official and MLF advocate Henry Owen wrote to McCloy that he was “struck by the amount of absolute nonsense which is being written” about nonproliferation. Owen suggested that McCloy write an article for the journal *Foreign Affairs* laying out the dangers of a dramatic shift in U.S. nuclear policy. Owen cautioned, “If we lose the public opinion battle on this issue, much of what we have been trying to accomplish in Europe over the past twenty years will be in grave jeopardy.”⁹² Robert Bowie, father of the original MLF concept and a government consultant and director of Harvard University’s Center for International Affairs, offered to help McCloy in this effort. Bowie recommended a “case by case” approach to nonproliferation and argued that a treaty could unintentionally “accelerate” the efforts of have-not states such as Germany, India, Israel, Japan, and Sweden to acquire an atomic weapons capability. Moreover, West Germany could expect a “British-French-U.S.-USSR” effort as “designed to keep her in second place,” which was “not a formula for a stable peace.”⁹³ As Bowie’s alarm continued to grow, he wrote to McCloy to say that because of the Johnson administration’s nonproliferation efforts, Atlantic relations were the worst they had been since 1950. Sacrificing the long-term health of the alliance, Bowie asserted, would lead to “disaster—not in some dramatic defeat, but in the gradual, inevitable erosion of the Western position.”⁹⁴

McCloy’s fears were not groundless. A number of German officials, for example, had already expressed long-standing concern about U.S. attitudes to-

90. McCloy to Kennedy, March 2, 1966, box DA1, folder 107, p. 1, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

91. Letter, Robert Kennedy to John McCloy, April 15, 1966, box DA1, folder 107, pp. 1–2, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

92. Owen to McCloy, October 16, 1965, box DA1, folder 110, pp. 1–2, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

93. Cover Letter, Bowie to McCloy, and Memo, “Article on Non-Proliferation,” November 3, 1965, box DA1, folder 105, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

94. Robert Bowie, “European Policy,” attached to February 15, 1966, letter to John McCloy, box DA1, folder 105, p. 1, Papers of John J. McCloy, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

ward nonproliferation. An FRG embassy official had told an ACDA representative in early 1964 that it was "completely unrealistic" to expect that "countries will forego the power that accompanies nuclear weapons." The Americans "had touched a very sensitive nerve in the German body politic" and should expect no progress on the "non-acquisition question" until "the MLF is achieved."⁹⁵ Twenty months later the West German ambassador to the United States told a high-ranking official from the State Department that the "FRG would not consider participating in [the] NPT unless [the] nuclear problems of [the] alliance have found satisfactory solution." The "defense of Europe" had to take "priority over accommodation of [the] USSR." He went on to say that the Soviets must make concessions in the "political or security field" first.⁹⁶ During a heated conversation with White House consultant Henry Kissinger, West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard stated that although he did not want his country to have nuclear weapons, he did not want to "stand before history as the man who rejected a nuclear option for Germany when it was in effect offered to him." When Kissinger asked the chancellor what nuclear option he was referring to, he replied, "ownership schemes . . . [that] protected Germany in case Israel, India or other small countries acquired nuclear weapons." A stunned Kissinger could not get Erhard to elaborate.⁹⁷

The West German government tried to keep its options open in the face of mounting U.S. pressure. Sacrificing the MLF to the Soviets would not convince "the bloc-free nations that primarily matter for the NPT—India, Israel, Sweden"—that their security would be improved. As one West German official put it, "These would be concessions from the wrong side and to the wrong address."⁹⁸ The domestic political stakes for the FRG were high: in the words of one U.S. observer, "If Erhard were to return from America with a signed nonproliferation treaty, 'civil war' would break out within the CDU/CSU [Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union Parties]." The normally moderate leader of West Germany's Social Democratic Party, Fritz Erler, stated that a nonproliferation treaty that excluded his country from power sharing would "force all parties to review their attitude toward the Atlantic Alli-

95. Memcon, Dr. Horst Blomeyer-Bartenstein and Mr. Richard B. Freund, "Observation Posts and Non-Acquisition of Nuclear Weapons," February 19, 1964, RG 59, box 1592, Defe 18–6, p. 3, USNA.

96. Telegram from State, October 26, 1966, box 56, History of the NPT, NSF, p. 2, LBJL.

97. Henry Kissinger, Memcon with Chancellor Erhard, January 28, 1966, DDRS, document no. CK3100383582.

98. Notes of Ambassador Schnippenkoetter, "Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NP)," September 7, 1966, document no. 277, in Matthias Peter and Harald Rosenbach, eds., *Akten zur Auswaertigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1966* (Munich, Germany: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997), Vol. 2.

ance.”⁹⁹ Erhard’s successor, Georg Kiesinger, told French President Charles de Gaulle in April 1967 that as the nonproliferation treaty was currently written, the FRG would “not sign it.” France and Germany had to “take an independent position towards both America and the Soviet Union” to blunt the superpowers’ efforts to make arrangements over their heads.¹⁰⁰ Kiesinger told U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey that the nonproliferation treaty was “the most difficult problem that has emerged in a long time” between the United States and Germany and emphasized, “what a serious matter it is for the Federal Republic.”¹⁰¹

Yet upon realizing that nonproliferation held the “utmost importance” for President Johnson, West German officials had little choice but to accept the United States’ new, stronger nonproliferation stance: “Everything else is secondary. . . . Nonproliferation concerns the President highly personally.”¹⁰² Nor would the West Germans receive any tangible benefits for acceding to the new policy. Secretary of State Rusk was blunt in his conversations with FRG leaders, stating, “I would be unable to support you if you made the question of reunification a condition for progress toward a general nonproliferation arrangement.”¹⁰³

The Gilpatric Report and the Shift in U.S. Proliferation Policy

On January 21, 1965, the Gilpatric committee issued its report. The committee recommended that the U.S. government develop stronger nonproliferation policies because “the spread of nuclear weapons poses an increasingly grave

99. Memorandum, Robert Neumann of UCLA to Lawrence S. Finkelstein, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, November 1, 1965, box 26, Papers of Francis M. Bator, LBJL.

100. Conversation between Federal Chancellor Kiesinger and President de Gaulle, Köln, Germany, April 25, 1967, document no. 142, in Ilse Dorothee Pautsch, Jürgen Klockler, Matthias Peter, and Harald Rosenbach, eds., *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1967* (Munich, Germany: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998), pp. 645–646.

101. Conversation between Federal Chancellor Kiesinger and the American Vice President Humphrey, April 5, 1967, document no. 120, in *ibid.*, p. 550.

102. Ambassador Schnippenkoetter to Secretary of State Carstens, September 15, 1966, document no. 291, in Peter and Rosenbach, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1966*, Vol. 2, pp. 1216–1217. According to this document, President Johnson “gave the order in June to formulate the position of the State Department, Pentagon, and Disarmament Commission. In so doing, he encountered significant differences of opinion. He then entered a long chain of advisory discussions and wrote memoranda with his own hand—an action that is unique in substantive questions about foreign affairs. The president needs progress in the NP” because “of the objective dangers of proliferation” and to demonstrate U.S.-Soviet good relations “despite the Vietnam War.”

103. Telegram, State to Bonn, July 22, 1965, DDRS, document no. CK3100054575.

threat to the security of the United States." If not stopped or slowed, proliferation would undermine U.S. political and military influence and encourage "a retreat to isolation to avoid the risk of involvement in nuclear war." The committee stated that a case-by-case approach to the proliferation problem was no longer effective because China's atomic test meant that the "world is fast approaching a point of no return in the prospects of controlling the spread of nuclear weapons." Thus when U.S. nonproliferation goals clashed with other policy interests, nonproliferation should take precedence. The U.S. government, the committee wrote, must give "nonproliferation policies far greater weight and support than they have received in the past."¹⁰⁴

The committee's report included a number of controversial proposals. For example, it recommended a full-blown U.S. effort to negotiate a nuclear nonproliferation agreement, a comprehensive test ban treaty, and regional nuclear-free zones. France should be isolated in the nuclear realm, and the United Kingdom should be encouraged to give up its independent deterrent. NATO strategy should begin to de-emphasize the organization's nuclear options. The entirety of U.S. policy toward China should be reexamined in light of its nuclearization (no specifics were offered), and cooperation with the Soviets should be pursued. On the most controversial issue—the fate of the MLF and the German question—the report acknowledged widespread disagreement within both the government and the committee. The committee did agree that the United States should "continue urgent exploration of possible alternatives to an MLF/ANF [Atlantic nuclear force] which would permanently inhibit Germany from acquiring nuclear weapons, but would nevertheless assure that, in the absence of German reunification, West Germany would remain as a real ally on the Western side."¹⁰⁵

The Gilpatric committee's conclusions elicited strong reactions. Secretary of State Rusk, for example, argued that the report was as "explosive as a nuclear weapon" and worked to keep it secret.¹⁰⁶ An apparent leak of the report's contents to Johnson's political rival, Robert Kennedy, threatened to undermine its credibility with the president. Kennedy, who in his first Senate speech called the "spread of nuclear weapons" the "most vital issue now facing the nation and the world," demanded that the Johnson administration assign "central pri-

104. "A Report to the President by the Committee on Nuclear Proliferation," January 21, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964–1968, Vol. 11, pp. 173–182.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

106. Seaborg, *Stemming the Tide*, p. 145.

ority" toward crafting a nonproliferation treaty. He declared, "We cannot allow the demands of day-to-day policy to obstruct our efforts to solve the problem of nuclear spread."¹⁰⁷ President Johnson responded angrily, "I need, I think, to have a position which would probably be a harder one than they would recommend and we will let the peace lovers get on board with Bobby and we will just not buy the thing. Let Gilpatric go his way. Now Gilpatric has been up to this, it is an old stunt for him to leak stuff. I told you when we put him on that Committee. It was against my better judgment, I did not want to do it but damn it, I just did not have the steel in my spine."¹⁰⁸

The idea, however, that as AEC Chairman Seaborg claimed, "the standing of the report with the president" was not "helped by the thought that Gilpatric himself was thought to have assisted Kennedy in preparation of his June 23 speech" misses the larger picture.¹⁰⁹ Thomas Schwartz convincingly argues that, as evidenced by a national security action memorandum dated June 28, 1965, President Johnson himself had accepted the thrust of the Gilpatric report's recommendations.¹¹⁰ In it, Johnson instructed his administration to develop a program to halt the "further spread of nuclear weapons." Most tellingly, he put ACDA (the department most in favor of Gilpatric's recommendations) and not the State Department (home to the nonproliferation skeptics) in charge of producing the new policy.¹¹¹

The report led to a far more active U.S. nonproliferation policy. On the question of whether the MLF should be traded for a nonproliferation treaty, the administration's judgments proved decisive. And although the bureaucratic disputes over the price the United States should pay to achieve nonproliferation continued, by 1966, the administration had begun to make an NPT treaty—and arms control in general—a U.S. foreign policy priority.

The shift in U.S. nonproliferation policy was not inevitable, and the Johnson administration made the change at great risk and some political cost. Despite

107. E.W. Kenworthy, "Kennedy Proposes Treaty to Check Nuclear Spread," *New York Times*, June 24, 1965.

108. "President Johnson's Conversation with McGeorge Bundy," June 24, 1965, 10:00 a.m., White House tape WH6506.07, program no. 2, LBJL.

109. Seaborg, *Stemming the Tide*, p. 149. Seaborg wrote, "I was surprised and disappointed that the AEC-written passages on scientists providing a common ground between nations and extolling the IAEA, which were present in earlier drafts, had been omitted. White House assistant Horace Busby told me in confidence that the material had been deleted at the last moment, along with words about halting nuclear spread, because the president had been annoyed by Kennedy's speech, which contained some of the same language as had been in the president's draft speech." *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

110. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, pp. 52–63.

111. National Security Action Memorandum no. 355, June 28, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964–1968, pp. 216–217.

the conventional wisdom, the Kennedy administration's policy was, at best, similar to the Gilpatric committee's option two (i.e., the "prudent course"). Kennedy had offered to help the French with their nuclear program at least three times,¹¹² displayed occasional ambivalence and confusion toward Israel's nuclear program,¹¹³ and considered helping India with its nuclear program.¹¹⁴

The Nixon administration was, if anything, even less committed to nuclear nonproliferation than the Kennedy administration had been. A briefing paper for President Nixon pointed out that "some have argued" that there were cases where an "independent nuclear weapons capability might be desirable," if only to "spread the responsibility for defense or enable the U.S. to reduce involvement in their defense." If it were decided that "the NPT was not in the U.S. interest," a formal disengagement would "have considerable support in the FRG and in some circles in Italy, Japan, India, Brazil, and Israel."¹¹⁵ An NSC memo argued that the "problems with the FRG are understated."¹¹⁶ The U.S. embassy in Japan cabled Washington seeking clarification of the following quotation by Henry Kissinger, which had appeared in a recent magazine article: "The nuclear nonproliferation treaty may have had the opposite effect: it may have encouraged nuclear proliferation."¹¹⁷ Nixon himself argued that "treaties don't necessarily get us very much," and that if countries wanted to "make their own weapons," they could "abrogate the treaty without sanction."¹¹⁸ In the end, while the United States would continue to support the NPT, Nixon made clear that he would "not pressure other nations to follow suit, especially the Federal Republic of Germany."¹¹⁹

So why were the Gilpatric committee and President Johnson willing to take great risks on what McCloy and other key architects of the United States' containment strategy believed was the most important question of the Cold War: the political and military status of Germany? The most important reason was

112. Francis J. Gavin, "The Myth of Flexible Response: American Strategy in Europe during the 1960s," *International History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 847–875.

113. See the internet supplement to Marc Trachtenberg's book, *A Constructed Peace*, at <http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/trachtenberg/appendices/appendixVIII.html>.

114. Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, pp. 52–53.

115. "Summary of NPT Issues Paper," January 28, 1969, box H-019, NSC Meetings File, pp. 1–2, Nixon Presidential Materials, USNA.

116. Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, January 27, 1969, box 366, National Security Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, USNA.

117. Cover Note from Haig to Kissinger, with cable, Tokyo to Washington, D.C., September 1969, NSC, box 366, Nixon Presidential Materials, USNA.

118. Minutes of the NSC, January 29, 1969, box H-12, NSC Draft Minutes, p. 6, Nixon Presidential Materials, USNA.

119. "List of Actions Resulting from Meeting of the NSC on January 29, 1969," box H-019, NSC Meetings, Nixon Presidential Materials, USNA.

their recognition that the United States had entered a new era. The great power competition that in October 1962 had brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war had eased considerably. Even critics of the new policy—such as former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson, who did not think the Soviets were serious about nonproliferation and did not want to run risks with Germany finding out—acknowledged that the United States was now living in a far different world in terms of security.¹²⁰ While criticizing the Gilpatric committee, Thompson also argued that the idea of a Soviet attack in Central Europe was a scenario “so remote that it is scarcely worth considering.”¹²¹ Given this assessment, it is no surprise that more far-sighted analysts would seek to update the United States’ strategic priorities.

Détente and great power stability in Central Europe would wax and wane over the next few decades, but it was clear that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction had become a permanent fixture in world politics. Proliferation and the transition from a bipolar to a more multilateral world that accompanied it—what U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson called the “revival of global polycentrism”—meant that U.S. “policies which were triumphs in 1950 have become barely adequate by the mid-60’s and are likely to be obsolete and in some cases counterproductive before 1970.” While the actions of countries such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Pakistan were hardly on the minds of most policymakers in the mid-1960s, Stevenson accurately predicted that proliferation, combined with “instability and radicalism in the underdeveloped world,” would become more pressing over time. This new world demanded new policies. The sensitivities of “the Germans,” Stevenson argued, “should not be permitted through their excessive nervousness to veto any forward movement in their area to the detriment of the world-wide security of the west.”¹²²

Conclusion

Policymakers and analysts often gloss over past tensions in the belief that today’s problems are unique. When they do look to the past, they “ordinarily

120. See Thompson to Fisher, “Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement,” May 20, 1964, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 5, USNA; and Thompson to the Secretary, “Talking Points for Meeting with the Gilpatric Committee,” n.d., RG 59, USNA, lot 67D2, box 24.

121. Thompson to Weiss, “Implications of a Major Soviet Conventional Attack in Central Europe,” December 29, 1964, RG 59, lot 67D2, box 21, USNA.

122. Stevenson to the President, “A Reassessment of United States Foreign Policy, 1965–70,” November 18, 1964, DDCS, document no. CK3100352013.

use history badly.”¹²³ The Bush administration and others should not dismiss the relevance of the 1960s to current U.S. concerns about nuclear proliferation, including the potential nuclear arming of Germany and Japan. In 1999 German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder described his country as “a great power in Europe” that would pursue its national interests, warning that NATO’s traditional mission as protector “against Germany” no longer had value.¹²⁴ In Japan, “talk of acquiring nuclear weapons” is no longer taboo.¹²⁵ The Bush administration’s plan to redeploy 70,000 U.S. troops out of Europe and Asia could increase the pressure on both states to acquire nuclear weapons.¹²⁶

Equally important are the lessons from the Johnson administration regarding “rogue” states and nuclear proliferation. Addressing the issue of real or potential proliferation among unsavory states such as Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan is no small challenge. Yet it is no more frightening than what the Johnson administration faced when it contemplated the consequences of a nuclear-armed China under Mao Zedong. Much could be learned from how a previous president from Texas dealt with this challenge.

Scholars and policymakers must begin to think differently about the periodization of nuclear history. Too much has been made of the sharp divide between the Cold War, post-Cold War, and post-September 11 international environments and their influence on nuclear politics. While critics often argue that the world today is far more dangerous, the majority of nuclear powers developed their weapons before the Cold War ended, while several others have disbanded their programs since 1989. Nor are the fundamental motivations for proliferation, such as the need for security and the desire for prestige, different from what they were forty years ago. Nor is there evidence that current “rogue” states would be any less rational or deterrable than authoritarian nuclear states such as Mao’s China or the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, the Cold War period was not static. By 1964 the United States and the Soviet Union had become status quo powers whose political conflicts were unlikely to lead to nuclear war. China, on the other hand, had become an aggressive foe whose behavior worried both superpowers. At the same time,

123. Ernest May, *Lessons of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. xi.

124. Roger Cohen, “A New German Assertiveness on Its Foreign Policy Stance,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1999.

125. Howard W. French, “Japan Faces Burden: Its Own Defense,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2003, online ed.

126. It was the decision to maintain large U.S. combat forces in both countries during the 1960s that strengthened the U.S. security commitment and dampened pressures in West Germany and Japan to develop nuclear capabilities. See Gavin, “The Myth of Flexible Response.”

pressure on West Germany and Japan to develop nuclear weapons left countries in both the Eastern and Western blocs deeply unsettled. Many new and potential nuclear powers no longer saw the Cold War as their most important concern, believing that nuclear weapons could guarantee their security in an uncertain world. This nascent multipolar world was more similar to today's international environment than is suggested in George W. Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy.

The history of the 1960s reveals important lessons for those seeking to craft an effective, long-term nuclear nonproliferation policy. In the early 1960s, many U.S. policymakers believed that nuclear proliferation was inevitable and that the United States could gain political currency by managing, and in some cases aiding, the efforts of would-be proliferators. In its efforts to retard proliferation, the Johnson administration faced difficult choices with potentially contradictory outcomes. Achieving nonproliferation required the United States to cooperate with an enemy—the Soviet Union—to hinder friends. Preemption carried grave risks, but so did appeasement. Arms control might be welcomed by nonaligned states, but it could weaken extended deterrence and lower the bar for new nuclear powers. A no-first-use strategy could delegitimize nuclear weapons but undermine the United States' commitments to nonnuclear powers. Additional military commitments could pull the United States into dangerous regional conflicts that had little connection to its national interests. Missile defense could deter nuclear aspirants or fuel further atomic spread. It does not appear that the Bush administration has grappled with these complex issues with the same rigor as the Johnson administration did.

This article demonstrates how an effective policymaking process can lead to better policy decisions. Through its thoughtful and intensive deliberations, the Gilpatric committee initiated a reconceptualization of the nuclear proliferation question; it analyzed the painful trade-offs that were necessary to implement a more active nonproliferation policy. Before focusing on specific questions and problems, the committee laid out four broad proliferation scenarios and identified the assumptions behind each before calculating how its adoption would affect U.S. interests. Aware of the bureaucratic politics involved, the committee took great care to seriously consider the interests of various government stakeholders.

President Johnson took substantial risks when he ordered the implementation of the Gilpatric committee's recommendations. By abandoning the MLF proposal and cooperating with the Soviets at the expense of West Germany, he overruled the "proliferation pessimists" in the State Department and "wise men" such as John McCloy and Dean Acheson, who did not believe that nu-

clear proliferation was either bad or inevitable. Overcoming political obstacles, the Johnson administration succeeded in negotiating the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which established an increasingly powerful international consensus against proliferation. This norm, which had been weak in the mid-1960s, acted as a powerful constraint against would-be proliferators. Johnson's policies paved the way for countries such as Germany and Japan to achieve a certain "virtuous" status by not joining the nuclear club, a status that brought domestic pride and a measure of international standing.

This process led to the adoption of thoughtful, less reactive policies that were in the long-term interests of the United States. Consider U.S. policy toward China, the ultimate "rogue" state. Before the Gilpatric committee's deliberations, U.S. policymakers had contemplated an attack, either alone or with the Russians, against China's nuclear facilities. Mao's regime did not appear "rational" or deterrable, and some analysts argued that a preventive strike would deter other states from developing nuclear weapons.

After thoughtful consideration, the Gilpatric committee and the Johnson administration wisely rejected preemption, both for China and in general. China has not, as was once feared, used its nuclear weapons. Nor has it been reckless or undeterrable. By 1969 China and the United States had begun a dialogue that flourished into a tacit anti-Soviet alliance by 1972, a mere eight years after the PRC acquired a nuclear capability. This relationship played an important role in ending the Cold War on terms favorable to the United States.

In some ways, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' early analysis of China mirrors the Bush administration's public portrayal of Iraq in the lead-up to the war. Insofar as Iraq was surrounded by potential nuclear adversaries (Iran and Israel) and threatened with regime change by the most powerful country in the world, Saddam Hussein's desire to develop nuclear weapons may be seen as understandable. Indeed North Korea and Iran have since increased the pace of their nuclear weapons programs. Additionally, Iran has exploited the current regional power vacuum to increase its support of terrorism while interfering with U.S. interests in Afghanistan and Iraq. A more thoughtful policy process, similar to the Gilpatric committee's efforts, could have produced policies that better served long-term U.S. interests.