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**THE RACE
AGAINST THE
H-BOMB**

DENIS HEALEY, M.P.

TWO SHILLINGS

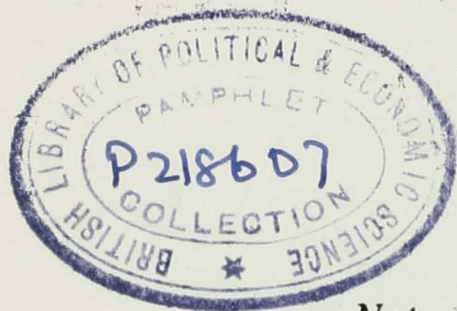
SOCIALISM IN THE SIXTIES



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FABIAN TRACT 322

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March, 1960.

Foreword

IT is peculiarly difficult to think straight about the impact of nuclear weapons on international relations. Reliable information about the nature of the weapons already in existence and under development is not easy to obtain—though much more is published in America than many people in Britain seem to realise. But since this is a field where what people think to be the facts can be even more important than the facts themselves, to trace one's way through the labyrinth of interacting national policies, each based on varying degrees of knowledge and understanding, is a baffling intellectual problem. Moreover, the moral obscenity involved in the actual use of atomic weapons revolts the imagination and discourages every attempt to think the problem through.

For this reason those who can brace themselves to study the problem objectively face a peculiar temptation—to abstract the technical and strategic implications of atomic weapons from the total political context of world affairs of which they are a part. So conclusions may be reached which, though perfectly valid within this narrow frame of reference, may be catastrophically misleading as a guide to action.

Another temptation is to seek escape from the problem altogether by proposing that Britain should immediately and without conditions give up her own nuclear weapons. Unconditional renunciation in this sense would in itself have no more influence on the fundamental problem created by the spread of atomic weapons capacity than clean living by an individual can stop a typhus epidemic.

The time will come, however, when Britain may be able to make a decisive contribution towards persuading others to accept the international control of atomic weapons capacity by offering to surrender her own nuclear stockpile. But to judge the timing and conditions under which such an offer would be effective requires a more careful analysis of the problem as a whole than most of the nuclear disarmers have cared to make.

In this pamphlet I have tried to present what I consider to be the more important aspects of the problem and to show how intimately they react on one another—how, for example, it is no longer possible to decide on a policy for national defence except in relation to a policy for international control of armaments, and *vice versa*. This is a field in which the pattern of events may change so rapidly as to force a re-appraisal of policy almost every year. But though, for this and other reasons, my own conclusions must be tentative and precarious, I believe my central thesis will remain unassailable: that the new technology of warfare has ruled out the hope of national security except through the international control of armaments, and that the most urgent problem facing mankind is to stop the spread of nuclear weapons.

I. Spread of Atomic Weapons

FOR the last fifteen years the possession of atomic weapons has been the one uncontested criterion of Great Power status—and the difficulty of producing atomic weapons has kept the number of Great Powers very small. But the French explosion in the Sahara shows that a new phase is fast approaching. Within ten years over a score of countries will be physically capable of producing atomic weapons for themselves if they think it politically worth while: and some of these countries, like Switzerland and Sweden, have previously been considered as only small powers in the game of international diplomacy.

There is no longer any purely scientific secret about the manufacture of atomic weapons. The engineering problems, though formidable, are within the capacity of any country which can produce, say, an automobile and a wristwatch. At present, the biggest obstacle is the cost of producing atomic explosive by the cumbrous systems of chemical separation. But fissile material suitable for weapons is a natural by-product of atomic power reactors. Within the next decade perhaps half the countries in the world may start amassing the raw material for atomic weapons in the normal course of increasing their resources of industrial power.

More than 40 countries have already embarked on atomic power programmes. A recent American study, published by the National Planning Association in January, 1960, under the title *The Nth Country Problem and Arms Control*, estimates that in addition to France there are a further eleven countries which could produce atomic weapons within the next five years on the basis of their existing resources—Belgium, Canada, Communist China, Czechoslovakia, Western and Eastern Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Sweden and Switzerland. There are another eight countries which could do so if they could obtain more scientific manpower—Australia, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland and Yugoslavia. A further six countries would probably require industrial as well as scientific assistance—Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Norway, Spain and South Africa.

Of course, placing particular nations in such categories involves begging a number of questions, some of which will be discussed below. In particular, the time required to proceed from the production of fissile material to the establishment of an operational atomic weapons system may prove in many cases to be more than five years. On the other hand, there are various ways in which the time of development might be decreased or the number of nations increased. An existing nuclear power might give technical or material assistance to a country which could not produce nuclear weapons on its own—France to Israel, for example. Or a group of countries might achieve by combining their efforts what none could do separately—perhaps the Arab countries in the Middle East. The diffusion of nuclear weapons might take place simply through the gift or sale of completed weapons from a 'have' to a 'have-not' country—from America or Russia to their

military allies or even to neutral countries. There is always the possibility of a technological break-through, perhaps in a country now without atomic weapons, which would greatly reduce the time, cost, or complexity of the process.

If we look beyond the next decade, economic growth in countries now too poor or backward will offer further powers a chance of entry to the nuclear club. In fact, the American study puts the cost of producing atomic bombs, as distinct from their delivery vehicles, remarkably low. It estimates that a country with the necessary technical and economic resources could produce its first two kiloton weapons from scratch for a total expenditure of 150 million dollars, covering everything from mining the uranium and building the reactors to constructing the explosive mechanisms. This cost might be brought as low as 10 million dollars in a country which had already amassed the required 20 kilograms of Plutonium 239 in existing industrial reactors. Further reductions in cost might be achieved at the expense of safety—for protection against radiation hazards is a major factor in the cost of any nuclear development.

The Political Chain Reaction

So far, no country has resisted the temptation to make its own atomic weapons once it has acquired the physical ability to do so—though some have made the most fervent protestations of non-nuclear chastity so long as they were impotent. In the immediate future the most likely candidates for membership of the nuclear club are certain countries in Western Europe which are at present in NATO. The precedent set by Britain and followed by France could lead West Germany, Italy and Belgium to achieve a similar nuclear independence within as little as five years from now. Moreover, if such countries also copy Britain in exploiting their readiness to produce their own nuclear weapons at the expense of the alliance, in order to obtain help from America in building them faster and more cheaply, atomic weapons may be as easily available as conventional weapons throughout NATO in a year or two.

At present it is as likely that America's NATO allies will obtain nuclear weapons by gift from the United States as by producing them themselves. For there is a growing tendency in America to escape from the political problems involved in sharing control of her own deterrent forces by giving her allies a few nuclear weapons outright. Such a development would enormously reduce the chances of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons outside Europe. For though the main argument by which Britain and France have sought to justify their bid for nuclear independence is to buttress the waning credibility of the American thermonuclear deterrent against Soviet aggression in Europe, they have both hinted that it is also intended to give them independence of action in other parts of the world. Ever since Suez, France and Britain have felt that an independent atomic capacity would greatly reduce the risk of intervention by the Soviet Union if they decided to pursue their interests outside Europe by force without American support. Mr. Randolph Churchill was speaking for a large

section of Conservative opinion when he told the American Chamber of Commerce in London on 13th November, 1958, 'Britain can knock down twelve cities in the region of Stalingrad and Moscow from bases in Britain, and another dozen in the Crimea from bases in Cyprus. We did not have that power at the time of Suez. We are a major power again'. Moreover, it cannot be denied that circumstances could arise in which a European country with its own atomic weapons might use them, or threaten to use them, against a non-atomic power outside Europe—after all, America did so against Japan. What happened at Sakiet with conventional weapons could conceivably happen one day to Tunis or Cairo with atomic bombs if the French army felt desperate enough about Algeria.

This sort of possibility will enormously increase the incentive for powers outside Europe to acquire atomic weapons for themselves once they have the capacity to do so. Once several European powers possess their own atomic weapons—particularly if they happen to have imperialist traditions—the Afro-Asian countries may feel it desperately necessary to follow suit. Each new member of the atomic club in any part of the world will inspire fears and jealousies among its particular enemies and friends, thus speeding up the chain reaction of nuclear diffusion.

Perhaps the most important single factor in this chain reaction is the impact of nuclear diffusion inside NATO on Russia's will and ability to resist China's demand for nuclear weapons. There are grounds for believing that Russia, though clearly reluctant to see her allies with their own nuclear weapons, has been pressed to copy whatever precedents America has set, even to the distribution of battlefield atomic weapons and of medium range missiles under the American system of double veto. If any further powers make their own atomic weapons on the Western side of the Iron Curtain, nothing will prevent China from achieving her stated aim of acquiring her own atomic weapons by 1961. And once China is known to have independent atomic striking power, Japan, India, and perhaps Indonesia too will have to follow suit, whether by manufacturing their own nuclear weapons or obtaining them from others.

2. Diminishing Deterrents

BOTH the cost and the value of atomic weapons depend primarily on the military strength of the country against which they are directed. In most Western countries the case for or against atomic weapons has been argued in the context of the cold war, on the assumption that the Soviet Union is the enemy against whom they are aimed. In this context the development of America's nuclear strategy in relation to NATO is both an incentive and a warning for European countries which seek atomic independence for themselves.

*Counterforce emerged
from counter-city party*

NATO was set up in 1949 to put Western Europe under the protection of America's atomic weapons. Providing her European allies undertook to help in building ground forces which would prevent Russia from advancing westwards without a major military effort, America undertook to retaliate against a Soviet invasion with all-out atomic attack on Russia herself. In other words, America threatened to strike the first blow in atomic world war if her allies were threatened with defeat in Europe by conventional forces alone. The threat was convincing to all concerned since she could implement it without risking retaliation in kind against her own territory. Moreover, the economic cost of such a strategy was tolerable, for she could rely on the deterrent being effective so long as she had sufficient atomic forces to destroy a large number of Soviet cities.

In 1952 the development of the hydrogen bomb, with its greatly increased destructive power, reduced the cost of such a 'counter-city' striking force. But by this time the Soviet Union had begun to produce her own atomic weapons and the means of delivering them inside the U.S.A., so America found herself compelled to develop a 'counterforce' capacity—if she were still to strike the first blow she must aim it at destroying Russia's retaliatory power rather than her cities. Otherwise it would be suicidal for her to implement her promise to NATO. Since airfields are much more difficult to locate and destroy than cities, a counterforce strategy required very much greater atomic striking power than a counter-city strategy.

In 1957 the launching of the Sputnik gave notice that before long Russia's hydrogen bombs would be carried in intercontinental missiles which it would be difficult if not impossible to intercept. A counterforce strategy would then require sufficient American missiles to destroy all Soviet missile bases simultaneously in a surprise attack, for aircraft would give too much warning of their approach. Quite apart from the almost insuperable difficulty of locating all Soviet missile bases day by day in peacetime—for Russia might well keep a proportion of her missiles permanently on the move—missile bases can be made immune to anything but a direct hit. The accuracy and destructive radius of American missiles is too low to permit the allocation of only one missile to each Soviet target. The most optimistic estimate is that a counterforce strategy against 'hard' bases would require a superiority of ten to one in missiles. Some would say much more—Admiral Powers recently comforted the Greek people when Russia threatened them for accepting American missile bases by saying that Russia would have to fire forty hydrogen bombs to destroy each American base.

Congressional hearings last year suggest that America has already lost her counterforce capacity and that the present Administration has no intention of trying to recover it. Indeed, there is some concern lest Russia instead may acquire sufficient counterforce capacity to tempt her into risking an all-out surprise attack on the United States. At this point the experts violently disagree. Some maintain that, within ten years, particularly if the submarine-based missile comes up to expectation, neither side will be able to count on destroying all the other's retaliatory power even in the most overwhelming surprise attack—in other words, that neither will be

able to apply a counterforce strategy to the other. In this case both might be content to keep small, highly protected second-strike countercity forces which could not rationally be used for surprise attack and which would therefore stabilise the balance of terror between Russia and America. There is some evidence that America's aim in the current negotiations on preventing surprise attack is to encourage such a development.

But though this is possible, it is by no means certain. It is conceivable that both sides may always find new ways of destroying retaliatory forces faster than they find new ways of protecting them. In any case the qualitative arms race between America and Russia is likely to continue even if the quantitative arms race is halted. Moreover, although neither power may think it worth while to seek a counterforce capacity against the other, if atomic weapons spread to other countries they may each find it possible and necessary to keep a counterforce capacity against third powers. In this case a secondary quantitative arms race would be superimposed on the primary qualitative race between America and Russia, and the instability of the balance of terror would be correspondingly increased.

European Deterrents

In fact, the probability that America may fall back on a second-strike countercity capacity against Russia is already stimulating her allies into producing atomic weapons for themselves. For if America once abandons a counterforce strategy she cannot easily afford to threaten nuclear retaliation against an attack on her allies. Indeed, Secretary of State Herter suggests that this is already the case. He told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 21st April, 1959: 'I cannot conceive of any President engaging in all-out nuclear war unless we were in danger of all-out devastation ourselves'. The fact is that even though a second-strike countercity capacity may be the best possible deterrent against direct attack upon oneself, it is of less value in deterring attack on one's allies.

Fear that the American nuclear deterrent may soon lose its validity for the alliance is the main rational ground why European countries, led by Britain and France, are beginning to produce strategic atomic weapons for themselves—though the prestige argument is no less important. None of the European countries are rich enough to think of producing a counterforce capacity against Russia—for them, even more than for the United States, the actual implementing of their atomic threat would mean national suicide. So they are even less likely than the United States to put their atomic weapons at the disposal of their allies—their hydrogen bombs are a deterrent only against direct all-out attack upon themselves as individual countries.

It is questionable whether even so any European state can afford to build a strategic atomic striking force which is powerful enough by itself to deter the Soviet Union. It is generally accepted that a country could deter direct aggression upon itself if it could convince Russia that it could inflict greater damage on her than its conquest would be worth. For example, Sweden might feel quite safe if she had the capacity to destroy

the single Soviet city of Leningrad. But there are doubts about the feasibility of producing even so minimal a deterrent force.

Britain's experience is significant here. She hopes that the 'stand-off bomb' carried in manned aircraft may remain capable of penetrating Soviet defences for a few years yet, but she is already developing the 'Blue Streak' missile for the day when aircraft are obsolete. And she has chosen a large fixed-base missile rather than a smaller and less vulnerable submarine missile because she believes that by the time air warfare is carried on wholly by missiles Russia may have an anti-missile missile—so Britain must have a missile large enough to carry not only a megaton bomb but also equipment for decoying anti-missile missiles. In other words, the 'Blue Streak' will be an anti-anti-missile-missile! Even so, the 1960 Defence White Paper suggests it will be obsolete before it is operational. Moreover, since Britain does not plan to strike the first blow in thermonuclear war, she must ensure that the necessary proportion of her missiles would escape destruction in a surprise attack. This is appallingly difficult and costly for a small country so close to Soviet missile bases.

If all these difficulties are honestly faced, the cost of providing an independent deterrent against the U.S.S.R. may seem insuperable. But many would argue that a European deterrent need not be genuinely independent—for its real function would be to trigger off the American Strategic Air Command if a crisis arose in which the President would not order it into action unless his hand were forced. The argument is that if Soviet radar screens picked up one missile travelling from an area where there were American or NATO missile bases the Russians would assume that a general attack had begun and retaliate against the whole Western system—or America would assume they might assume this and immediately join in. Under this theory, the European H-bomb has a catalytic function; it offers Europe a share in physical control of the S.A.C. far more convincing than any juridical agreement with the United States.

There is another school of thought, particularly in France, which favours a much cheaper delivery system than Britain considers necessary. It maintains that, though no European country could afford a first strike counterforce capacity, it could usefully build a first-strike countercity capacity. The cost of this would be much less than that of a second-strike countercity capacity like Britain's, since a first-strike force does not need any protection for its bases. Such a country would have to threaten to commit suicide if it were in danger of attack, rather than after it had been attacked. It is questionable whether Russia would believe that any government had the fortitude to implement such a threat. But a greater danger in such a strategy is that if there were a crisis between Russia and the country concerned, Russia would have an overwhelming incentive to strike first against its bases, since they would be totally vulnerable. The way would be open for the most dangerous type of brinkmanship. But for this very reason an unstable first-strike countercity force of this type might be more effective as a catalyst than the expensive, highly protected second-strike countercity force planned by Britain.

In any case, it is clear that the value of an independent European deterrent would be multiplied many times so long as the country concerned was allied with other nuclear powers, notably America. But it is difficult to see what incentive America would have for alliance with such a country—for in such a situation the alliance would offer her more risk than security. If America then had an invulnerable second-strike countercity capacity of her own she might well prefer to write off all her strategic commitments in Europe rather than to put herself at the mercy of trigger-happy allies. This danger is increased by the fact that any European country which starts producing its own atomic weapons system is likely to be compelled by their cost—as Britain was—to reduce its contribution to the NATO shield, thereby widening the range of incidents to which NATO is incapable of any response except suicide.

For all these reasons NATO is now entering a period of crisis. Its current strategy seems inadequate to many now that Russia's thermonuclear striking power has reduced the credibility of all-out thermonuclear retaliation by the United States as a deterrent to the invasion of Western Europe. But the European tendency to seek independent national atomic forces to make up for this is likely to weaken NATO still further—even though the value of independent European deterrents depends largely on the American alliance.

3. Time to Call a Halt

THE problem of finding a solution to the strategic crisis inside NATO has thus the most direct bearing on negotiations between Russia and the West for the control of armaments—as will be seen below. Unfortunately, however, the difficulties which might discourage a European country from seeking nuclear independence of the United States against a possible attack by Russia may be quite irrelevant in the case of countries for whom the Cold War is not the major problem.

A country which wants atomic weapons for bullying an enemy with poor defences and no atomic weapons of its own may be satisfied with a few kiloton bombs and a primitive delivery system—two nominal atomic bombs exploded in the holds of cargo vessels in the harbours of Haifa and Tel Aviv could destroy Israel as a state. Thus in some circumstances a small country may expect to gain much more than a large one by joining the nuclear club.

Many countries in the world have local enemies against whom they would be fully prepared to use force if they felt confident of victory at a reasonable cost. Once atomic weapons begin to spread into the Middle East, Africa and Asia there will be greater danger that nuclear striking power may be used not just as a deterrent, but for aggression. A country which acquired several hydrogen bombs before its enemy had any would

practical outweigh the moral in the calculus of decision policy

have a tremendous incentive to use them while it had overwhelming superiority and before it found itself condemned to the ruinous and unending competition in which America and Russia have been engaged in the last few years. There were compelling moral and practical reasons why America did not use her atomic forces against Russia before Russia started to produce atomic weapons. Such reasons might not seem as valid if the countries concerned were, for example, China and South Korea, or even Israel and Egypt. In such a case the advocates of a preventive war might well have their own way.

she had too few

Precisely for this reason, once their industrial reactors begin to produce plutonium of weapons grade, every country in a given political grouping will feel it vitally important to start making nuclear weapons for itself, in case its enemy beats it to the draw. Moreover, the costs and risks of external intervention to halt or control this process of nuclear diffusion will increase geometrically with the development of local atomic forces.

There are some people who argue that the last ten years' experience has shown that peace will be more secure the more countries have their own atomic weapons, because the risks of nuclear war will then be better understood. This is a frighteningly superficial view. Peace cannot be secured by universal terror. It is theoretically conceivable that a stable balance of world power might be constructed if every country in the world had the capacity to destroy any other country in the world which attacked it by surprise. But we have seen that in practice even the balance between America and Russia alone is unlikely to achieve such stability. The limited experience of the last ten years shows that the development of atomic weapons can proceed at different rates in different countries. Once the process becomes general, there will always be times when a given country has an overwhelming temptation to use its atomic superiority while it still exists, in case the enemy catches up and overtakes it. Current discussion in America and Russia of the importance of surprise attack and the pre-emptive blow indicates that a world of thermonuclear powers would be infinitely more unstable than any mankind has yet known—even though the cost of that instability may be the end of mankind itself.

In my opinion, it is this fact which offers the best hope that governments with the capacity to produce their own atomic weapons may yet be persuaded not to do so. At present each potential entrant to the nuclear club acts as if it had the choice between being one of a small circle of thermonuclear great powers or remaining for ever with the small powers in the second rank. But that is not the real choice at present. The immediate choice is between halting the spread of nuclear weapons for good in the next few years or toppling willy-nilly into the sort of thermonuclear anarchy in which no country will ever be able to feel secure again. Of course each new member of the atomic club hopes that he will be the last. But in fact each addition to the select few greatly increases the incentive for others to join. So prospective candidates must face the fact that their national security may be better guaranteed by attempting to halt the diffusion of nuclear weapons altogether.

Unless a start is made in the next few years the practical possibility of halting nuclear diffusion will soon become a hundred times more difficult or even disappear for good. In the present state of scientific knowledge, when weapons-grade material can be produced only in atomic reactors or in large and costly separation plants, it would be technically possible to prevent atomic weapons production in new countries by confiscating or 'poisoning' the plutonium 239 produced in industrial reactors and by prohibiting the construction of separation plants. Such a control system would be comparatively cheap and simple to operate—indeed Britain and the United States have both insisted on such controls as a condition of sale when exporting atomic reactors. But it is at present possible for countries to build atomic reactors independently without submitting to such controls. Moreover, as atomic power development gathers pace all round the world the exporting countries may be tempted by fear of commercial competition progressively to reduce the security standards on which they now insist and which, besides offending the national prestige of the receiving countries, greatly add to the cost of operating the reactors. For this reason it is urgently necessary to establish by international treaty procedures which would prevent the production of weapons-grade material, and the machinery to enforce these procedures. In fact the International Atomic Energy Agency, established under the United Nations as a result of President Eisenhower's 'Atoms for Peace' proposals, is ideally suited to perform such a function.

The Technique of Control

It is difficult to exaggerate the urgency of establishing such international control. For if once a country has acquired a few hundred kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium it has a good chance of making atomic bombs without being found out—even if at a later date an international control system is established in its atomic plants. And once it has made a stockpile of weapons, there is at present no way known of discovering where they are hidden.

Thus, as soon as atomic reactors in a given country have been operating for long enough to produce a stockpile of weapons-grade material, that country's enemies or neighbours may be unwilling to put their own reactors into an international control system for fear that it is already in a position to make the weapons without being found out. For this reason, though it might not be difficult now to establish an international control system to prevent the production of weapons-grade plutonium, once a few countries are known to have been operating reactors for long enough to stockpile plutonium 239, their enemies will have every reason to refuse submitting to control. The problem has already arisen in the argument between Russia, America, Britain and France about a ban on nuclear tests, for a test ban is also a step towards stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. Britain and France argued that a test ban would simply leave them in a position of permanent inferiority unless America and Russia agreed to cease production of atomic weapons and to convert their existing stockpiles to peaceful

use. Russia and America argued correctly that a cut-off on production was a hundred times more difficult to control than a ban on tests, and that there was no scientific means of discovering stockpiles of weapons in any case. Britain was finally won over to the idea of a test ban when America promised to give her the information she would otherwise obtain by testing. Lacking this information, France remains obdurate.

It is these considerations which have led the British Labour Party to propose the formation of a 'non-nuclear club' which would restrict the possession of atomic weapons to the two countries whose stockpiles are in any case too big for verification and detection. It has promised that if all other countries agreed to submit to the necessary inspection and control, a British Labour Government would not only do the same, but would also surrender all the atomic weapons it then possessed. Such a proposal raises many problems for which solutions could be found only in multilateral negotiation. But it is difficult to imagine any practical alternative which gives a better hope of halting the diffusion of nuclear weapons during the few years left while the problem is technically a simple one. Of course, it would be infinitely preferable to include America and Russia as well in such a system. But there is little hope of solving the technical, military and political problems involved in their adherence in the next few years.

On the other hand, because the main obstacle to the formation of a non-nuclear club along the lines proposed by the Labour Party is likely to be the declared intention of the French and Chinese Governments to possess their own atomic weapons, Russia and the United States may have to make a contribution towards its success. Their most obvious concession, which would bring them into line with the non-nuclear powers to some extent, would be agreement to submit to the same controls on their atomic reactors, so as to guarantee at least that they produced no more weapons-grade material. And it is likely that each would have to give its respective allies greater control over the use of the atomic weapons it still possessed.

For the problem is not simply one of satisfying the demand of the non-nuclear powers for equal status—although the fact that the atomic missile has become a diplomatic virility symbol does complicate the matter. As shown above, the desire of the European countries for their own nuclear weapons is to some extent a natural response to the new strategic situation created by the balance of terror between Russia and the U.S.A. The dwindling credibility of the American deterrent now that Russia has the power to respond in kind has created a feeling of insecurity among America's allies which must be removed if they are to be persuaded to forego production of their own atomic weapons.

To put it bluntly, America's strategic stake in Western Europe is smaller than it was when NATO was created because she no longer needs European bases for her nuclear striking force. Meanwhile, the risk she runs in implementing a strategy of massive thermonuclear retaliation in response to even a conventional attack upon her allies is unimaginably greater. Fears created by these strategic changes have been heightened recently by what some Europeans consider a new American softness towards

Soviet policy on Germany and by the possibility that America's dollar deficit may lead her to cut her military commitments abroad. Unless these fears can quickly be reduced there is no prospect of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons inside Western Europe—even though, ironically enough, the spread of nuclear weapons is likely to accelerate still further the process of unilateral American disengagement from the Continent.

4. Security in Europe

WHAT alternatives are there which offer Europe the prospect of greater security? There are three main lines of escape from the dilemma—to create a greater capacity for local defence in Europe, to give Western Europe a greater share in control of the American deterrent, and to reach agreement with Russia on the control of armaments in both parts of Europe. We shall soon see that these alternatives are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

In the United States, opinion seems to favour creating a much greater capacity for local resistance to Soviet aggression in Europe so that, even if the need for strategic thermonuclear retaliation by the United States is not wholly eliminated, the threshold of provocation at which it must be invoked is considerably raised. Thus the National Advisory Council of the Democratic Party recommends a substantial strengthening of European, British, Canadian, and American ground and tactical air forces assigned to NATO or in strategic reserve; it further suggests that these forces should aim at defending Europe with conventional weapons only, keeping tactical atomic weapons in the background solely as a deterrent against the use of similar weapons by the Soviet Union.

The role of tactical atomic weapons in Europe presents problems almost as baffling as the role of thermonuclear weapons in all-out war. Whatever the chances of limiting atomic war to military targets in other parts of the world, very few people believe there is much chance of doing so on the Central European front. Thus if NATO initiates the use of tactical nuclear weapons, the European countries it is supposed to be defending are likely to suffer at least as terribly as they would in all-out war. Moreover, few experts now believe that tactical atomic weapons give more advantage to the defence than conventional weapons. Many take the opposite view—that Russia would have a nett advantage in limited nuclear war because she would find it easier to replace the tremendous casualties involved.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that a limited nuclear war in Europe is more likely than a limited conventional war to lead to all-out thermonuclear war. For this reason if Russia believes the West is likely to respond with tactical nuclear weapons to even a conventional attack she may well decide that her real choice is between starting all-out thermonuclear war and doing nothing—this was Foster Dulles's argument. But

the same argument applies to the West; if Russia decided after all to challenge Western fortitude by mounting a conventional attack, the West might have to decide whether to give in or to risk all-out thermonuclear war by introducing tactical atomic weapons to the battlefield. In such a situation the West might well decide for appeasement. There are thus great dangers in the current trend, for NATO's ground forces are moving towards a position when they will be incapable of fighting at all without atomic weapons.

A further problem arises. Because the use of tactical atomic weapons may lead to all-out thermonuclear war, the Western governments are likely to insist that they are not used without a positive political decision. But if such a decision waits until the conventional forces of both sides are in contact on a large scale, it may be impossible to introduce them to the battlefield without risking enormous Western casualties. Moreover, the small-yield weapons now under development by the United States may have to be distributed down to platoon level in peacetime; some of them have the warhead unit built into the delivery vehicle. In such circumstances political control of the decision to use them becomes physically impossible. No doubt this is why the Democratic Advisory Council proposes to concentrate on the conventional defence of Western Europe, and why some Western military experts who reject disengagement nevertheless see advantages in the Rapacki plan for a nuclear-free zone.

Nuclear Sharing

The Democratic Party's proposal is obviously the best option so far as America herself is concerned. But many Europeans see it as an attempt to release America altogether from the retaliatory role which originally made NATO attractive to them. They fear that if Russia did attack they might find themselves not only suffering the whole weight of the war on their own territory but also losing the war in the end. For though NATO might hope to match the Soviet conventional forces at present in Eastern Europe, NATO could not be expected to match all the forces which stand ready in the Soviet Union itself and which might be thrown into the fighting at a later stage—or which might indeed be brought into Eastern Europe before the fighting began at all. The only action then possible to NATO would be massive thermonuclear retaliation; but there could be no guarantee of this so long as the physical power of retaliation is exclusively in American hands. Indeed, if once large-scale conventional warfare was already under way it would be comparatively easy for Russia to use the threat of a pre-emptive strike to blackmail the U.S.A. into keeping her thermonuclear forces out of the war for good. If, on the other hand, Europe can rely on American thermonuclear retaliation at this stage, why not invoke it earlier before large-scale land warfare has destroyed most of the Continent? Thus Europe's co-operation in building bigger defence forces along the Iron Curtain is likely to depend on America's agreement to give Europe a much more convincing share in control of the alliance's nuclear forces. This second alternative is obviously the best

option for the countries of Western Europe. So a process of bargaining is already under way. It looks as if Britain has succeeded in obtaining American assistance in building her own nuclear forces in return for an undertaking to halt the withdrawal of her conventional forces from Germany. France is attempting to follow suit, though so far with less success.

But any form of nuclear sharing which involves letting the European countries have their own strategic deterrent is liable in time to disintegrate the alliance, as has already been shown. For once the European countries have built up their thermonuclear forces they will be tempted once more to cut their contribution to NATO's forces for limited war and rely on their new capacity to trigger off the S.A.C.; and in this situation America might decide to give up the alliance altogether. This result could be avoided if it were possible for the alliance to create a genuinely collective thermonuclear striking force. But here we come back to the old problem. Because all-out thermonuclear war is suicidal, though each country will want to be able to invoke it on its own behalf in the last extremity of national survival, none will want to be committed to it on behalf of another! Each country wants full control both of the trigger and of the safety catch—and this is practically impossible. The problem would be different if NATO were a federation and not a coalition of sovereign states, and it would become more soluble to the extent that NATO moved towards federation. But even those who have argued most strongly for the creation of a collective NATO deterrent have so far been unable to suggest, except in the most general terms, how it might work in existing circumstances.

It is proposed, for example, by Mr. Alastair Buchan in his book *NATO in the 1960s*,¹ that NATO should establish strategic missile bases all over Western Europe which unlike the S.A.C. and British Bomber Command, should be directly under control of a NATO general—as, in theory, General Norstad had direct control over NATO's 'tactical' atomic weapons. But in practice General Norstad controls the atomic weapons at present deployed among the NATO forces not because he is SACEUR but because as an American officer he is subject to the control of the American President—and all NATO's warheads are in the juridical and physical possession of American troops. A strategic missile force in Europe would be subject to all the same disadvantages as the S.A.C. is at present if the officers in command were American and the warheads of the missiles were under direct American control; plus the additional disadvantage that they would be geographically much more vulnerable to surprise attack than the SAC bases in America. They might instead be more of a provocation than a deterrent.

If, on the other hand, they were in the possession and under the control of Europeans all the existing problems between America and Europe would be reproduced among the European countries themselves. For the European members of NATO do not constitute a genuine political entity as any

¹ Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960, for the Institute of Strategic Studies.

meeting of the NATO Council clearly shows. Indeed, they find it easier to agree with one another when the United States is present than when they are alone together. The divisive fears and jealousies now straining NATO'S unity—when only America controls the atomic trigger but all control the safety catch—would be vastly multiplied inside a purely European framework. And one almost certain consequence would be the formal withdrawal of the S.A.C. from its current deterrent role on behalf of NATO. In fact, some proposals for a European NATO deterrent force reflect that persistent trend in American thinking which would like to build a United Europe as a sort of Maginot Line behind which America could sink back pleasantly into hemispheric isolation.

Fortunately this is a problem which it is less difficult to solve in practice than in theory. For when the penalty for miscalculating the Western reaction may be total annihilation, Russia is likely to be deterred from aggression by a threat of retaliation which has a much lower degree of credibility than is required to satisfy America's allies. To take a concrete example, the current practice of separating the warhead of atomic weapons from their delivery vehicle so that two countries have a physical veto over their use may seem highly unsatisfactory both to America and the ally concerned: but it is doubtful whether the weapons seem any less menacing to Russia for this reason. The problem for NATO is essentially a psychological one—to increase mutual confidence and solidarity so that the allies no longer demand a degree of certainty about America's response which is out of all proportion to what is really needed to deter the Russians.

Soviet Intentions

For the advent of the megaton missile, creating a new dimension of warfare, has completely revolutionised the relationship between military capacity and political intention. In the past the governments of powerful states have tended to base their military policies on their estimate of the enemy's military capacity rather than his intentions—since the latter are more difficult to discover for certain, and can change rapidly. That is why military relationship between hostile great powers usually takes the form of an arms race. But in the thermonuclear age the economic burdens of an arms race are likely to cripple even the richest powers without offering them even the theoretical prospect of the sort of superiority through which they could achieve real security.

In such a situation a power which does not propose to use its military strength to start a war may rationally base its military policy on a careful estimate of the enemy's intentions, assuming that it can deter aggression so long as it can present the enemy with risks which are out of proportion to the value of what he might gain even by victory. The enemy, on the other hand, if he is proposing to start the war, cannot afford to rely on any estimate of his opponent's intentions alone, since he must assume that once the fighting starts his opponent may use all the military strength he possesses before surrendering—even if it is strictly irrational for him to do so. Small countries have often succeeded in deterring a more powerful

neighbour from attacking them simply by threatening a resistance which, though it would involve them in great suffering and could only end in defeat, would cost the enemy more than their conquest was worth. The advent of thermonuclear weapons, even one of which may produce more casualties than any single country suffered in the whole of the last World War, has enormously reduced the degree of credibility needed to make such a deterrent policy effective.

The Russian leaders are no doubt intrigued by the current debate in the West about the type of challenge which would provoke the employment of the whole of the Western thermonuclear capacity. But they show no inclination whatever to take advantage of the uncertainties in Western intentions which are revealed in that debate. So long as America retains the power to devastate the Soviet Union, Russia is most unlikely to take even a small risk of challenging that power. She is unlikely to forget what happened in Korea. In early 1950 America withdrew her troops from the peninsula and offered South Korea no political guarantees in return: moreover both General MacArthur and Secretary Acheson publicly announced that America had no strategic interest in the integrity of South Korea. At first sight there could have been no clearer indication of American intentions—Russia must have considered it almost a formal invitation to take the country over. Yet the Communist troops had not been across the frontier an hour before the American President decided to intervene and brought the whole of the United Nations with him. Moreover, as the fighting developed America came very close to extending the local war and risking general conflict.

America's allies naturally draw different lessons from the attack on Korea and the course of the argument over how to fight the war there. They are more aware of what the South Koreans endured so that America and Russia could keep the war limited once it broke out. They do not feel safe with a strategy which is irrational in the sense that it demands disproportionate sacrifices or risks of either America or Europe. But Russia on her side can never rely on the West making a purely rational response to aggression—both her doctrine and her experience have taught her that capitalist countries can react irrationally to a Communist challenge. This gap between the allied demand for total security through a strategy which will make resistance rational at every level and the Soviet refusal to believe that the West will necessarily capitulate because resistance is irrational has been well illustrated in two recent crises.

Many people opposed the American and British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan because they feared Russia might accept the challenge to fight a limited war with the West in an area where she had overwhelming superiority. But the Russians did not even dare to threaten limited war—they confined themselves to vague threats of massive thermonuclear retaliation which no one, outside the Arab world, was even expected to take seriously.

Even more striking, military experts in Washington and London in November, 1958, feared that Russia had issued her ultimatum on Berlin

because she wanted an opportunity to exploit her local military superiority to inflict a demonstrative defeat on NATO. But when Western fortitude did not collapse at the first blow of Khrushchev's trumpet Russia showed no sign of making a military challenge—instead she chose diplomatic retreat. Ten years earlier during the last Berlin crisis, she cut off Western land access to the city and took a significant risk of general war by buzzing Western planes on the airlift. At that time she had not exploded her first atomic weapon—to-day she is approaching atomic parity with the United States itself. In other words, the increase in America's atomic strength over the last ten years seems to have influenced her policy more than the much greater increase in her own atomic strength.

Of course, the comparative restraint of Khrushchev's behaviour has many other causes besides the risk that America might respond to even a local military challenge with all-out thermonuclear war. The West has always over-estimated Soviet readiness to use war as an instrument of policy. And though Stalin in his last years showed an uncharacteristic adventurism, he and his colleagues learnt by bitter experience that a local aggression, even if successful, was more likely to produce unity and rearmament in the West than the reverse. At present Khrushchev could not adopt a war-like posture without ruining a policy of peaceful co-existence which is still bringing him substantial gains. There is every reason to believe that he genuinely wants peace and disarmament, if only because he is confident of beating the West in economic competition without any of the risks involved in war. Moreover, he must be increasingly conscious that even victory over the West in all-out war might leave Russia so enfeebled that China would then become the natural leader of the Communist camp.

It is particularly tragic that at a moment when the likelihood of attack by Russia in Europe is less than at any time since the war, the European countries should be threatening the stability of the situation by demanding a degree of security which is impossible through armaments alone in the atomic age. For the problem is essentially a political, not a military one.

5. Reversing the Trend

ANY solution of NATO's strategic dilemma depends essentially on increasing mutual confidence and solidarity inside the alliance. In the old days the best way of achieving this was to exploit Soviet hostility—Stalin could usually be depended on to come to NATO's aid by making the Russian threat more obvious and frightening. But this familiar process depended on America's willingness to threaten all-out war in defence of Europe, and Europe's lack of any alternative to the American deterrent. The situation is very different to-day. In the last twelve months Khrushchev's threats over Berlin have produced a rather ambiguous response

from both the United States and her European allies. President Eisenhower and Secretary Herter have given contradictory impressions of America's likely response to Soviet military challenge on Berlin. The conflict between London, Bonn and Paris on this issue is common knowledge. Thus, though the Western response has been sufficient to deter the Russians, it has increased the mutual fears and suspicions inside NATO.

The fact is that, given the declining credibility of the American deterrent, if allied fear of Soviet attack increases, NATO's strategic dilemma will become more, not less, difficult to solve—for a military challenge would undermine NATO's collective solidarity at what has now become its most vulnerable point. For this reason, the third possible approach to NATO's dilemma—namely, an agreement with Russia on some form of arms limitation and control on both sides of the Iron Curtain—may soon be seen, not as an alternative to NATO, but as a condition of NATO's survival. It is equally true that such an agreement with Russia would depend in part on increasing mutual confidence between the NATO allies—for any arms limitation affecting European countries but not the Soviet Union itself would leave the former more dependent on the United States and Britain.

The aim of such an agreement would be to rule out the possibility of a massive surprise attack in Central Europe and to reduce the main danger which worries both military and political circles in the West—the possibility that a large-scale war in Europe might develop out of a frontier incident or out of a local upheaval. It would not exclude the theoretical possibility of a Russian invasion mounted from deep inside Soviet territory—but for various reasons this is most unlikely, and is in any case just as possible under present NATO strategy. Finally, success in a regional scheme in Europe would greatly improve the prospects of universal and comprehensive disarmament.

An approach to Russia along these lines has long been recommended as part of a policy of disengagement—though 'redeployment' is now considered a less disturbing word for it. It is significant that the most recent converts to the idea are military experts like Viscount Montgomery and Dr. Kissinger. But, though the British Government once seemed willing to experiment along these lines, NATO as a whole has refused to take up the idea, mainly because Dr. Adenauer is unwilling for the Federal Republic to accept any further limitations on its military freedom until Germany has been reunified. For, despite the growing evidence to the contrary, the non-nuclear powers tend to believe that somehow or other the possession of nuclear weapons will increase their bargaining power with America and Russia so as to produce concessions on problems of national concern.

Defence Minister Strauss, for example, said in February, 1958, that when Western Germany had her own atomic weapons she would be able to compel both America and Russia to take the problem of German reunification more seriously. Thus a proposal for regional arms limitation in Europe or elsewhere is likely to be acceptable to the countries which must accept control only if they are persuaded that it will make it easier, not more difficult, to change features of the *status quo* which they dislike.

That is why the Western powers have so far had to refuse consideration of proposals for the limitation or redeployment of arms and forces in Central Europe unless it were accompanied, or even preceded, by the settlement of political problems.

There is little doubt, however, that certain forms of arms limitation in the area, by relaxing tension and de-emphasising strategic considerations, may create a more favourable context for political settlements than an acceleration in the local arms race, which is otherwise inevitable. For it cannot be assumed that if NATO takes steps which substantially increase its military strength in Western Europe Russia will not respond to the extent necessary to keep the balance of forces at least as it is at present—thus increasing all the present incentives for the West European countries to acquire their own atomic weapons, and tying the East European countries still more firmly into the Soviet bloc.

Moreover, unless some steps are taken soon towards the agreed limitation of armaments, NATO may soon find itself involved in hair-raising dangers by its failure actually to implement any of the military strategies it has previously decided upon. In theory, NATO strategy is now one of graduated deterrence. NATO aims to meet any level of attack except full-scale invasion by a form of response which is adequate to stop the fighting before it escalates into total thermonuclear war. But, in fact, NATO's weakness in conventional forces is so great that it is doubtful whether its troops will soon be able to fight at all without at least battlefield nuclear weapons. As shown above, there is something to be said for the deployment of small-yield nuclear weapons behind NATO's front line as a deterrent against their use by the other side and indeed as a deterrent against a massive attack by conventional forces alone. But in practice the only likely cause of fighting in Central Europe is not a deliberate decision by the Soviet Union to commit aggression but a spontaneous local upheaval—like that in East Germany in 1953 or Hungary in 1956. Such an upheaval might involve Soviet and Western forces in direct conflict with one another against their will, however powerful the mutual deterrents against deliberate aggression. In such a situation, the extent of NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons could be suicidal.

Moreover, according to General Norstad, the main role of NATO's ground forces in case of deliberate but small-scale aggression—as distinct from such a brushfire war—is to enforce a pause in the fighting during which the Soviet Government must face the choice between abandoning the enterprise altogether and deliberately starting global thermonuclear war. But the West German forces are being provided with missiles which can carry atomic warheads as far as Warsaw and even Moscow—completely abolishing any chance of such a pause.

Until either comprehensive global disarmament can be achieved or the political problems arising from the post-war division of Europe can be solved through some form of disengagement, the security of Western Europe is likely to depend in the last resort on the balance of thermonuclear power

between Russia and the United States. All the evidence suggests that in present circumstances neither of the great powers has the slightest intention of risking even local war in the pursuit of its aims in Central Europe. But if NATO continues to seek additional security by pursuing a local arms race against Russia in Central Europe, this stability is far more likely to be upset than reinforced and one of the consequences will be the further disintegration of NATO itself. Thus the regional control of armaments in Europe may be a precondition of NATO's survival as well as a precondition for stopping the spread of nuclear weapons.

Looking to the Future

I cannot pretend that even if the NATO countries succeed in thus creating the necessary conditions for stopping the spread of nuclear weapons in Europe, the larger problem of stopping their spread elsewhere will be a simple one. For though it is probable that all the non-Communist countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin-America would at this time prefer to have their atomic development put under permanent international control rather than live in the thermonuclear jungle which is otherwise inevitable, recalcitrance by Communist China could still wreck any agreement. But this is no reason for not attacking the problem as energetically as possible.

No country in the world can any longer hope for absolute security except through a comprehensive and universal disarmament system which implies the creation of something very close to world government. But very few countries in the world have ever enjoyed total security. The real problem now is to reverse the trend. Unless steps are quickly taken towards stopping the spread of nuclear weapons we shall soon be looking back on the worst days of the cold war as a golden age of peace and international understanding.

Fortunately, the spread of nuclear weapons capacity has given America and Russia a clear common interest for the first time since the Cold War began—an interest in trying to freeze the distribution of world power along the lines in which it settled after the end of the Second World War. And it has given their allies a similar common interest in ensuring that any such freeze in the balance of power should involve limitations on the freedom of action of America and Russia themselves no less than the rest of the world.

So the impact of the new weapons on international relations is not wholly negative. The very magnitude of the danger they represent may evoke a response of comparable grandeur—if it does not, the species *homo sapiens* may disappear for failing to live up to its name.

* * *

The author wishes to thank the editors of *Commentary* magazine of New York for permission to reprint material contained in an article he contributed to its issue of January, 1960.

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