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PAUL DOTY

The Role of the Smaller Powers

As FRANCE greeted the fifteenth year of the nuclear age with the explosion of her first atomic bomb, the nuclear club expanded for the first time in nearly eight years. Without international agreements or a display of national self-control uncommon to these times, admissions will come with much greater frequency. Today the smaller powers, the twenty-odd nations that by their own efforts could gain admittance to the club within another eight years, await their inevitable rendezvous with Mephistopheles. The magical power can be theirs, but they are haunted by the uncertainties of the exchange. It is with the question of the desirability of the smaller powers' possessing nuclear arms, and the alternatives they have if the temptation is denied, that this article will be chiefly concerned. The issues are viewed both from the standpoint of the smaller powers and the strategic position of the Western alliance.

The identification of the smaller powers cannot be exact but a useful approximation is available as a result of a study undertaken in 1958 by a small group of scientists working under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to determine the capabilities of nonnuclear nations for producing nuclear weapons. This group concluded in their report[1] that twelve nations (including France) were technically able to embark on independent, successful nuclear-weapons programs in the near future and that eight others could follow shortly. Of these twenty, six were members of NATO (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, and West Germany), four were members of the Warsaw Pact (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland), five were other European nations (Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia), three were major Asiatic powers (Communist China, which is dealt with in a separate article, India and Japan), while standing

alone in the Southern Hemisphere was Australia. At least six others should be ready to join this list a decade hence. These then are the Nth countries, those nations for whom nuclear-weapon capabilities can be secured by their own efforts. What will their choices be?

The Experience of Britain and France in the Nuclear Club

Thus far, the nations that have joined the nuclear club have done so in the order of their technological and economic capability. For the Soviet Union, admission was an overwhelming strategic necessity: for Britain and France, the decision turned not only on strategic but also on political and economic considerations, prestige, influence in Washington, commercial interests and scientific ambitions, as well as other reasons only remotely related to the Russian threat. An assessment of what membership has brought Britain and France is clearly relevant to whether or not capability alone should continue to be the condition on which the decision to qualify is decided.

Unlike France, Britain's decision to become a nuclear power was made at the dawn of the nuclear age, when the consequences of success were unclear but full of military promise. From her experience, however, nuclear weapons are seen to have played a dominant but unpredictable role in her changing military posture and accommodation. On the point of expectation, however, it is clear that early membership has brought them a specially favored relation with the United States in the determination of policy and has made possible a unique acquisition of American nuclear techniques. Yet from the day of her admission to the club in 1952, Britain has had to contend with a series of unforeseen difficulties. The first was Russia's unexpectedly early qualification for membership, so that by the time Britain began stockpiling atomic bombs, it was vulnerable both because of its newly independent position and because of its previous acceptance of American bombers on its airfields. Then began under joint Anglo-American responsibility the vast military blunder of our neglecting conventional war capabilities, in the mistaken view that nuclear weapons would do instead. This generated the greatest stresses on NATO, quickened the insistence on rearming Germany, and introduced tactical nuclear weapons, with no doctrine to cover their use.

With the arrival of nuclear parity in the mid-fifties and the imminence of long-range missiles shortly thereafter, the doctrine of massive retaliation needed a successor. In 1957 the British Minister of Defence stated, "We have decided not to defend the whole coun-

try, but to defend only our bomber bases," and in 1958 it was affirmed that any major acts of aggression by the Russians, even with conventional weapons, would be countered by British nuclear weapons. But since it had been made clear that the consequences would likely be the total destruction of the country and its people, the credibility of this policy was questioned abroad, while at home, the citizenry began to take exception to the self-sacrificial role for which they had been cast. It was this realization that sparked the campaign for nuclear disarmament, "the most powerful non-party political movement since the War," and initiated an intense debate, which has not yet reached its zenith, over the wisdom of denouncing membership in the nuclear club and setting up a non-nuclear club. This dramatic shift recently received the sanction of one of Britain's best known writers on military affairs, P. M. S. Blackett, who concluded his analysis[2]:

> In fact, I can see no plausible way in which the European defense community can survive either with its own nuclear forces or with individual national nuclear forces. I feel that the present situation, with an American safety catch on all its nuclear weapons, wherever situated, is much more stable than either of those alternatives. However, to keep it stable, it is essential that Britain renounce her own nuclear forces, otherwise their spread to other countries will never be checked.

In the ethical field as well, new voices, independent of the campaign, called for the redress to the erosion of morals that was required to justify the deliberate plan (in certain military circumstances) to annihilate tens of millions of men, women, and children, as against which the victims of Hitler's gas chambers would hardly be remembered. It remained for Lt.-General Sir John Cowley to sum it up[2]:

> The professional fighting man chooses death (instead of dishonor) so that his country may survive, or, on a grander scale, so that the principles for which he is fighting may survive. Now we are facing a somewhat different situation, when the reply is not to be given by individuals but by countries as a whole. Is it right for the government of a country to choose complete destruction of the population rather than some alternative, however unpleasant? Should we in any circumstances be morally right to choose not only the termination of our own existence as a nation, but also the existence of future generations of our own countrymen?

Nor is this the end of Britain's difficulties. Nuclear bombs are essentially useless without delivery systems. In attempting to keep up with the transition from bomber to missile, Britain has spent more than £100,000,000 on developing the Blue Streak Rocket. Early in 1960 it became clear that this rocket would be obsolete before it

could be tested. It was consigned to the scrap heap, and Britain opted out of the missile race. This raised the fundamental question: could Britain by itself muster the resources to stay in the nuclear race over the long pull and maintain its posture of an independent nuclear deterrent?

Thus the price Britain has paid for membership in the nuclear club has been very high and is rising. Yet Britain survives and as a nation prospers. Many think that this would probably be the case if it had not been a member; but some find grounds for doubt, taking unassailable refuge in the indisposition of history to allow experiments to be repeated.

If we turn to France, matters simplify, since we have to deal only with motives and expectations, which de Gaulle and M. Moch have articulated rather clearly. The French decision began with the proposition that no alliance or commitment would be strong enough to compel any nation to risk nuclear destruction to aid another. Thus, it is argued, the only nuclear power that will deter an attack on France is one that rests entirely in French hands. Some Frenchmen go on to make three further points: the only nuclear deterrent that will protect other European countries is one that lies completely in the hands of each country; therefore, each European country should have an independent nuclear capability; and since the interests of France are closely enmeshed in those of Europe, France will be safer if every major European country has its own nuclear weapons. De Gaulle's speeches suggest that the mission of French nuclear arms is to build a spearhead of a third force with the rest of the "Europe of Six" constituting the shaft of the spear. In November 1959 he stated, "We must have this atomic force, whether we build it or buy it." But in the real world of 1960, France does not have this choice. Alone, within the next few years, she can only load obsolete and highly vulnerable bombers with bomb loads that are so indecisive as to make the pretension to a third force a mockery. Of course, a major motive in their developing atomic bombs has been their hope that the initiation fee for the nuclear club would bring with it the privilege of sharing in atomic plenty and the means of delivery thereof. This has not been forthcoming, nor can it realistically be expected that either major nuclear power would yield to France the essential components of a third force capable of being pointed at any future date in whatever direction France's particular idea of "balance" required. Thus, by self-deception, France postpones until some future date the reappraisal that tortures Britain today. Already many prominent Frenchmen are questioning the

wisdom of the present course, and such men as François Mauriac, Georges Duhamel, and others have denounced the French tests and petitioned for the renouncing of nuclear weapons, "thereby bringing to other peoples the example of a confident and generous will to cooperate and to reinforce the hope of a humane peace which alone will permit world disarmament."

The Smaller Powers and the Nuclear Club

Despite the sketchiness and unbalance in our summary of the British and French experience with membership in the nuclear club, it provides invaluable guidelines to other smaller powers pondering the decision to join, and it confronts the two major nuclear powers with the problems that will be multiplied if membership in the club increases.

If a potential nuclear power judges that its prestige and influence outweigh the cost, and that the threat in Britain of the first split of its bipartisan defense policy in modern times and the helplessness in France to turn a few bombs into a third force are special to those countries, there still remains the question of how much security, if any, is being bought. For NATO members (and in so far as they are free to choose, the Warsaw Pact countries), the strategic arguments vis-à-vis a major power threat cannot be dominant, because they cannot hope to challenge the massive concentration of explosive power and the variety of advanced delivery systems being built up in the Soviet Union and the United States. Nor is it reasonable to expect that an independent nuclear capability of modest proportions could be used to insure the involvement of the American striking force in a crisis, although the risk of doing so would be a destabilizing factor. In short, only a rather low-class, apprentice type of membership seems to be open in the nuclear club, at least in the 1960's.

This conclusion needs perhaps the qualification that those nonnuclear powers with large land masses should be excepted. The reason is that during the coming decade the two major powers will have the capability of devastating a physically small country without diverting their guard against the other major powers. Communist China, India and Australia obviously fit these conditions. For all the others a modest nuclear capability carries no real threat in a potential conflict with either of the major powers. It could only be punitive when used in a first strike, but that would bring a devastating retaliation. In a second strike, the result would be the same, but the

damage to the major power would be greatly reduced. Even France must recognize this inescapable asymmetry.

For the other European powers, the situation is little different in effect. Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, and others enjoy an independence that rests upon a strong tradition which is protected by virtue of the fact that a threat to their independence would produce tensions and the risk of a thermonuclear war quite out of proportion to any gain that would come to the instigator. Indeed, it is this condition, together with the weight of quickly reacting world opinion, that extends to all neutrals a protection against military aggression that was almost unknown before the nuclear age.

For the nations somewhat removed from the East-West balance of power, considerations of security are focused on other potential sources of aggression. If China becomes a nuclear power, India, Japan, and even Australia may consider themselves threatened and become actively interested in reacting in kind. The common denominator is the same in all these cases: if a country can gain a nuclear capability that is significant in terms of the potential threats it faces, it can be strategically justified in doing so.

This last point suggests that even in Europe, in the shadow of the Soviet and American atomic umbrellas, a smaller power may develop a small nuclear arsenal, and, by inciting suspicion among neighboring states, induce them to proceed likewise to protect themselves against a day when the mutual concern of the United States and the USSR may be diverted to them. For example, if Spain and not France had become the fourth member of the nuclear club, the reaction in France could have been accurately predicted. So it is that, while most of the smaller powers do not have strategically valid reasons to justify nuclear arming, the decision to do so by any of a number of individual nations could trigger others into following suit, since the threat presented by a nation with a few newly acquired nuclear arms is a challenge they could dare to meet.

Yet strategic considerations, as viewed by the smaller nations, are not likely to be the point upon which the decision to acquire nuclear arms will turn. A diffusion of nuclear arms is more likely to arise in two ways. Other nations experiencing the same heady drive of nationalism as is France will find the acquisition of nuclear arms irresistible as a source of prestige and a symbol of status. Alternatively, if either the Soviet Union or the United States and Britain come to believe that a wider dissemination of nuclear weapons is inevitable, or if the stresses of the cold war intensify and require the ultimate demonstration of faith in "trusted allies," the *carte-blanche*

transfer of nuclear weapons and delivery systems might be expected. It is well known that the United States came close to making this decision in February 1960, and it can be easily imagined that the Soviet Union continues to be hard pressed, particularly at times like the Quemoy Crises, to share her atomic plenty with Communist China. It may be well to examine briefly the restraints that both the nuclear powers and the smaller powers will face in contemplating these possible actions.

The Incentives of the Non-Nuclear Club

The case for the major nuclear powers' keeping the nuclear club limited to its present membership is fairly obvious and this is the major motive behind the negotiations for the cessation of nuclear tests. First, there is the natural incentive of the nuclear powers to keep for themselves the vast military power of nuclear weapons. Moreover, the present nuclear powers, having the most to lose if nuclear weapons are used, consider themselves the safest keepers. And then there is the statistical argument: the fewer fingers on the nuclear triggers, the fewer chances of their being pulled. And finally, the dissemination of nuclear weapons, once begun, will have no limit, so that in the end, nations, or rather national leaders, unhampered by the responsibility of the present nuclear powers, will be tempted to use them under trivial provocation. This dissociation of action from responsibility points the way to atomic chaos, where the attacked might not even know the attacker.

Of course, a number of possibilities exist between the present position with Anglo-American and Russian safety catches on all nuclear weapons (except those few in French hands) and the extensive diffusion of such weapons without responsible control. But even to proceed from the present position to one in which NATO members had independent control of weapons provided to them would represent substantial risk to any common defense policy for NATO. Given its present centrifugal tensions, it seems unlikely that a breakup of NATO into a number of nuclear-armed and mutually suspicious states could be avoided. The idea of having a jointly operated nuclear deterrent in Europe likewise does not bear inspection, since it would be too ponderous to be effective and would risk the involvement of all the partners by the careless action of any one.

Nor is the transfer of nuclear weapons to allies any more attractive when tactical weapons are considered. This raises the whole unsettled question of tactical nuclear weapons in the NATO context

and can be summarized thus. With no experience in their actual use, it remains uncertain how they would be deployed to be effective, whether more or fewer troops would be required, how supply would be maintained with ports highly vulnerable, how escalation could be avoided, how the people one wishes to protect could be saved from obliteration and even whether such weapons favor the offense or the defense. Obviously, confusion would only be compounded by allowing these questions to be judged by a number of independent authorities.

The uncertainties in the use of tactical nuclear weapons remains, even when they are under Anglo-American and Russian control. The disadvantages to either side that would follow from its initiating tactical nuclear war loom so great that it seems safe to predict that this possibility would be delayed until all other less dangerous means were exhausted. In short, more prolonged exposures to the rigors of nuclear strategy have led to increasing disenchantment with proposals for limiting nuclear war. The consequence is a reassessment of the role of conventional land armies in dealing with the explosive clashes of national wills, so as to maintain a risk that is commensurate with the provocation. The basic military mission of NATO is to provide just such a series of graduated responses. In the end the argument leads unavoidably to the conclusion that the only sensible military policy for the West would be to counter the Soviet conventional offensive forces in Europe by conventional counterforces. This conclusion immediately suggests that the European democracies should again take up the old-fashioned and unpopular job of raising armies by conscription—probably no more popular now than when suggested in a somewhat different context in 1958 by George Kennan.[3] In short, the harsh fact is that it is in conventional arms, together with their continued development, that the West has been lulled into a dangerous neglect, and it is in the redress of this unbalance that the smaller powers could make their strongest contribution to the defensive strength of NATO. This would mean the abandoning of any pretense that the use of nuclear weapons in Europe would be likely to do other than lead to widespread nuclear war. But, in exchange, it does provide a reliable means of dealing with a range of more likely problems, a means that is known to favor defense by a factor of at least three, and a means in which independent national control can be exercised to a large extent.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that by offering an alternative to tactical nuclear weapons this development would indeed contribute to disarmament. Moreover, it would appear likely that any

disarmament process will at some stage put considerable reliance on conventional forces.

These views are, of course, quite contrary to those now officially held by the French, which by the extension of their logic would lead to the development of an independent nuclear capability for every nation. By thus littering the world with nuclear booby traps, a fatal Soviet-American thermonuclear exchange would almost certainly be triggered.

If we put aside the French view, it would appear that the present precarious balance of world power has, nevertheless, a certain stability which is vulnerable to an extension of independent nuclear capabilities. By abstaining from nuclear weapons, the smaller powers can contribute to this stability; by taking certain military measures, they can actually strengthen it. But we have not dealt with the several positive steps they can take to improve their own security and contribute to a less militarized and more peaceful world.

The Security and Defense of the Smaller Powers

The military revolution of the postwar period has for all time taken from "security" and "defense" much of their meaning. It was recently revealed[4] that the estimated explosive power of the United States's nuclear weapons exceeds the equivalent of ten tons of TNT for every inhabitant of the world. If all the other nuclear powers together have a similar amount, the total would be an amount of TNT sufficient to cover the entire land area of the world with a blanket an eighth of an inch thick. For a small country, at least, defense against this level of explosive power magnified by its radiological consequences is, in any direct sense, impossible, and security can only really describe the relative effectiveness with which such a power is restrained.

This way of describing by analogy the potential destructiveness in which we are immersed is particularly dismal, precisely because it pictures a situation in which the destructiveness has spread to its limit and is uncontrolled. The source of such security and defensive possibilities as the smaller powers may possess derives largely from the concentration and control of nuclear power in a few nations. Hence, as we have concluded earlier, the security interests of the smaller powers lie in keeping nuclear weaponry stored up in a few countries, in which the variables affecting its release remain manageable.

In the area of defense the outlook is not so limited. While the

smaller powers would be impotent to deter the major nuclear powers if they became bent on mutual destruction, the much more realistic concern is the prevention of small wars, or their containment, if they do start. Here the smaller powers play a crucial part, beginning with the insuring of their own defense and their abstaining from any provocative action.

The defensive posture of a smaller power, directed as it must be to a relatively small locale, will be strong only as it incorporates purely defensive components. These include reliance on conventional forces which have in so many cases proven their value in defense over offense. In many instances, the Swiss example of a citizen soldiery may be superior to military units on the pattern of World War II. As such, they could provide the core of a civil-resistance movement on any territory overrun by the invader. The neglect of this role, like the neglect of civil defense by the nuclear powers, greatly weakens the military posture. However, this is not the place to repeat Mr. Kennan's arguments for this course.

It may be well, however, to introduce one other facet of this situation, by calling attention to the unique role which chemical (and perhaps biological and radiation) weapons can fill in the defense of smaller countries. The emotional reactions so often directed against these weapons are inconsistent with a realistic appraisal of modern weapons. Indeed, with the practical development of nonlethal but incapacitative modes of action, these weapons stand alone in allowing an improvement that is not coupled to increased destructiveness. And it is in a defensive role for smaller countries that their advantages are most obvious. For example, by their use a border can be made impassable without destruction and at low cost. The citizenry can be provided with inexpensive and effective protection in advance. In short, chemical agents are increasingly adaptable to the graduated needs of the defense of small countries, and their development and use deserve careful reconsideration in the over-all effort to diminish the risk of nuclear war by reducing the likelihood of aggressive acts by the smaller nations that may by chain reaction lead to an involvement of the major powers.[5]

Disarmament and the Smaller Powers

Beyond the counsel of abstention in regard to nuclear weapons and beyond the military preparations for effective defense lie a number of positive actions by which the smaller powers could guide the world through its present perils and on to the ultimate reconciliation

of the human race. Several possibilities can be envisaged in which the smaller powers could play a leading role.

The first area in which the smaller powers can demonstrate their interest in arms control and disarmament is, of course, by contributing ideas and criticism to discussions and negotiations already underway or soon to begin in this area. It is widely admitted that the thought and planning devoted to problems of arms limitations by the major powers is quite inadequate when the magnitude of the problem is viewed in perspective. That is, for twenty years there has been a ceaseless application of the world's best scientific and technological talent, supported by the resources and national will of the great powers, to the improvement of competing military forces. The forces which this has put in motion easily constitute the most extensive and organized effort of modern man. To find a means of controlling and reversing this prodigious effort will require much more than the modest attempts now underway. With the major powers preoccupied with negotiating positions and detailed evaluations, a special need could be filled by the smaller powers by initiating new ideas, suggesting means of resolving conflicts and offering their judgment of the value of each successive development. Indeed, the complexity of the problems that must be solved if disarmament is to be approached is such that the active, informed, and sustained interest of the smaller powers may well be an absolutely essential ingredient for maintaining the interest of world opinion as successive attempts and failures tend to breed a fatalistic apathy.

This coin has an opposite side as well: the need for constructive cooperation in each stage of arms control that the great powers can agree upon. The Nuclear Test Cessation negotiations provide a clear and cogent test to the smaller powers on this point. In the negotiations themselves the smaller powers do not have a direct voice. But by informal approaches and better liaison with the participants the informed concern of the smaller powers could have a useful impact. If a treaty in this area is achieved, the smaller powers will have a new and greater opportunity to contribute. This obviously arises because the success of such a Test Cessation Treaty will depend upon the agreement to restraints among the smaller powers just as much as among the nuclear powers. In this, or whatever may be the first disarmament measure agreed to by the major powers, the critical phase will be that in which the adherence of all the smaller powers (and China) will be sought. It is difficult to foresee a more searching test of the concern, the vision, and the diplomatic skill of the smaller powers. Their role would be vital in reaching the nearly unanimous

agreement essential to such measures. Failure at this stage would bring to an end the disarmament effort that had gone furthest toward fulfillment.

Another example of a situation in which the cooperation of the smaller powers would be vital is in the often discussed proposal for disengagement, particularly in Europe. The details of the several specific proposals need not be discussed here. What is important is the growing acceptance of such proposals in the West as well as in the East. As the Anglo-American nuclear deterrent becomes less and less credible in the eyes of West Europeans, the land defense of their homeland receives a higher priority. This is compatible with, and could be aided by, the creation of a zone of disengagement in Central Europe. With different reasoning, the East European countries are led to similar conclusions. As time passes, the Soviets have less need on several counts to insist on the political and ideological conformity of the members of the Warsaw Pact. Thus, if this is not a misreading of the many indications of increasing flexibility, the time is near when an initiative by smaller powers may elicit an acceptance of an area disengagement by the major powers. Of course, an experiment in disengagement, by itself, will not assure progress on the road to peace, but it will present new opportunities for the relaxation of tension, for the return of more nearly normal contacts in Central Europe, and for the trial of a new kind of accommodation between East and West. Beyond this, it offers a test case for disarmament, since denuclearization and later disarmament itself could find their initial trials in this arena.

In addition to the general area of responsible involvement in the planning and early stages of disarmament measures, other roles[6] of the smaller powers can be mentioned briefly. For example, there is the unique role that the smaller powers could play in the evolution of a permanent and effective United Nations Emergency Force or its equivalent. That this is an urgent need at present and an essential device in maintaining a balance of power as disarmament might proceed has been widely documented. While such a force has often been opposed by the Soviet Union and some other nations such as India, the establishment of at least a stand-by force has been sanctioned by the Uniting for Peace Resolution passed by the United Nations Assembly in 1950. Moreover, it is widely agreed that if such a force were established on a permanent basis, it should not include permanent Council members. Hence, there is here a vital opening for wise initiative and concerted action by the smaller powers.

Third, there will be a large and demanding role for the smaller

powers to play if and when disarmament gets under way. Whether the route of partial measures or of comprehensive disarmament is followed or not, the need for technical and military personnel trained in modern weaponry and communications, skilled in languages, competent in administration and perceptive and understanding in human relations will be very great indeed.

Finally, the smaller powers cannot remain oblivious to the opportunities for moral leadership that their abstinence from nuclear weapons affords. The unselfish aid of many such nations in the area of refugee relief testifies to their responsiveness to human need. The power of example remains a valid means of influencing the conduct of nations as it does the conduct of individuals. The nations that share the benefits of industrial civilization are divided by ideological prejudices and human passions that many smaller powers can help to put into a perspective based on civilized values rather than the arbitrament of unreasoned and unlimited power.

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3 George R. Kennan, *Russia, the Atom and the West.* New York, Oxford University Press, 1958.

4 Major-General John B. Medaris, in the *New York Times,* 21 April 1960.

5 The consequences of research and development in weapons systems are difficult to predict, hence such recommendations require some caution. In the case of agents of chemical warfare, their further development and deployment by the smaller powers could stimulate the major powers to a greatly expanded effort in this area, resulting perhaps in a breakthrough to a different lead in efficiency. This would have unpredictable effects. However, the possibility of a substantial breakthrough in chemicals seems unlikely, since effectiveness as based on weight appears to be approaching a limit. To incrase the yield, therefore, one can depend only on increasing the efficiency of dispersal at the target.

6 A discussion of many specific roles that the smaller powers could play cannot be included here since they depend on particular disarmament plans which are beyond the scope of this article.