



NONPROLIFERATION

AND THE

NATIONAL

INTEREST

AMERICA'S RESPONSE TO THE
SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

PETER A. CLAUSEN

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to the Spread of
Nuclear Weapons

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Nonproliferation and the National Interest: America's Response to the Spread of Nuclear Weapons

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Preface

The proliferation of nuclear weapons looms as a fundamental threat to global security in the final years of the twentieth century. Few questions will have a greater impact on the success or failure of efforts to construct a peaceful world order in the aftermath of the Cold War. Indeed, if "the bomb" continues to spread to additional nations, the mellowing of the East-West conflict may prove to have brought only a Pyrrhic victory over the menace of nuclear war.

As the 1990s began, the gathering influence of proliferation on world politics was apparent. The Persian Gulf war drew belated attention to Iraq's determined pursuit of nuclear weapons, which Bush administration officials portrayed as a leading justification for military action against that country. Destruction of the Iraqi nuclear program became an urgent U.S. priority in the ensuing conflict. The later discovery of the impressive scale of Iraq's nuclear weapons program, most of it based on imported technology and facilities, raised fundamental questions about the adequacy of the existing nonproliferation regime. The Gulf war also stimulated broader awareness of Israel's unavowed but substantial nuclear capability, and the potential for conflagration inherent in the intertwined proliferation of atomic, chemical, and ballistic-missile weapons in the Middle East. In another region of chronic conflict and instability, India and Pakistan—both *de facto* nuclear powers—moved to the brink of war over the disputed territory of Kashmir in early 1990. The implicit nuclear dimension of the crisis prompted a high-level U.S. diplomatic effort to defuse tensions. In addition, the breakup of the Soviet Union posed novel proliferation threats. Overhanging these developments, a fateful deadline approached—the 1995 renewal date for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the centerpiece of global efforts to stem the spread of nuclear weapons.

Proliferation is not a new issue. The inexorable diffusion of nuclear technol-

ogy was foreseen even before the United States tested the first atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico, in July 1945. Three months earlier, Secretary of War Henry Stimson had warned President Truman that America could not hope to enjoy an enduring nuclear monopoly. Moreover, Stimson wrote, the problem of controlling the bomb's spread, and the U.S. attitude toward sharing the weapon with other nations, would become "a primary question of our foreign relations."

The decades since World War II have borne out this forecast. The Soviet Union tested an atomic bomb in 1949, ending the U.S. monopoly. In the next fifteen years, Britain, France, and China joined the circle of acknowledged nuclear weapon states. Thereafter, proliferation continued apace, but in a more veiled and ambiguous manner. Israel, India, Pakistan, and South Africa advanced toward the bomb along various clandestine and deceptive paths, without openly admitting it. A number of other nations—including Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, Libya, Iran, and Iraq—actively sought nuclear weapons at one time or another.

Stimson's prediction that the diffusion of nuclear weapons would present severe foreign policy challenges has been amply confirmed as well. From the start of the atomic age, the United States recognized a powerful interest in preventing proliferation. At first this meant attempting to thwart Soviet acquisition of the bomb—a self-evident goal in the emerging Cold War of the late 1940s. But U.S. policymakers also came to believe that the spread of nuclear weapons even to friendly countries should be discouraged. Largely at American initiative, an elaborate international framework—the "nonproliferation regime"—was established to support this objective. Gradually strengthened over the decades, the regime includes the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its inspection system, the NPT, and cooperation among the industrial countries to control and restrict exports of nuclear technology. Despite weaknesses, this framework has unquestionably helped delegitimize the ambitions—and retard the progress—of would-be nuclear powers. It is equally evident that this success would not have been possible had the United States not discerned a vital national interest in nonproliferation.

But the close historical link between nonproliferation and U.S. self-interest has another side. Efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons are not cost-free; they cut across a whole range of issues and policies that engage other important American interests. Nonproliferation impinges, directly or indirectly, on questions of American-Soviet relations, U.S. ties with European and Asian allies, regional conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, energy and trade policies, and U.S. economic and military aid to Third World countries. Inevitably, these intersections create policy dilemmas and trade-offs, because vigorous nonproliferation efforts often do not fit easily with the pursuit of other objectives.

Amid the clash of competing interests, the actual priority of nonproliferation in U.S. policy has fluctuated widely over time and from one country to another. Notwithstanding America's historic leadership role in nonproliferation policy, American efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons have in practice been ambivalent, equivocal, and selective—and, as a result, too often ineffective. In the 1950s, Dwight Eisenhower found a strict approach to nonproliferation dif-

difficult to reconcile with a strong Western alliance, or with the economic and political lure of sponsoring nuclear power overseas. Lyndon Johnson's determination to secure the NPT in the 1960s drove a wedge between the United States and its Cold War allies, as did Jimmy Carter's campaign against the nuclear "breeder reactor" ten years later. Ronald Reagan faced an irreducible tension between U.S. laws designed to punish Pakistan's quest for the bomb and his desire to arm that country against the Soviet threat in neighboring Afghanistan. George Bush went to war against Iraq when geopolitical interests and nonproliferation objectives coincided, but he found himself in a dilemma when he tried to maintain good relations with China while seeking to curb proliferation-prone Chinese nuclear exports. And for more than two decades, the President and Congress have favored Israel with a tacit exemption from U.S. nonproliferation efforts.

This book is a history of American policy on the spread of nuclear weapons. Following Henry Stimson, it treats the subject as "a primary question of our foreign relations," centering on the nexus between nonproliferation and U.S. foreign policy. This vantage point has the merit of being realistic. It anchors the study of nonproliferation in its political and historical context, and underlines the fact that America has opposed the spread of nuclear weapons, not as a moral or humanitarian imperative but out of hard-headed calculations of interest. Policy-makers have defined the problem not in abstract terms but through the prism of their broader foreign policy goals, principles, and prejudices. This prism has shaped their sense of the nature and urgency of the problem, and their assessment of the costs and benefits of alternative responses to it.

The goal of this study is thus to probe the underlying logic of American choices and actions on nuclear proliferation. It explores the chronic dilemmas and conflicts that have beset U.S. policy in this field, and attempts to illuminate the sources of ambivalence and mixed motives that have inhibited that policy. A better understanding of the past, in turn, is crucial to making nonproliferation policy more coherent and effective in the future. Accordingly, the book attempts to extract from the historical record lessons and guidelines for avoiding past pitfalls in addressing the proliferation challenges ahead.

The study is organized chronologically, tracing the evolution of American nonproliferation policy from its origins during World War II. In each period, the book explores the interplay between nonproliferation and the major themes of U.S. foreign and national-security policy. Three recurring patterns mark this history: a conflict between heavy U.S. reliance on nuclear weapons to deter the Soviet Union and the attempt to deny these weapons to other countries; a tension between limiting the burden of U.S. overseas commitments and addressing the security needs of would-be nuclear powers; and a reluctance to exert strong U.S. pressure against the nuclear programs of close allies and client states. Running through the course of U.S. policy, these dilemmas largely define America's reluctance, at critical junctures, to pay the true costs of nonproliferation. As the final chapter argues, however, the ending of the Cold War may create opportunities to soften, if not escape altogether, these historical constraints and inhibitions. To do so, the United States will need to articulate, and act upon, a clear sense of its national interest in stemming proliferation.

Chapter 1 examines the attempt of U.S. policymakers to come to terms with two revolutionary challenges simultaneously after World War II—the Soviet Union and nuclear weapons. Focusing on the debates over the Baruch Plan, cooperation with Britain, and the growing U.S. dependency on nuclear weapons, the chapter shows how the emerging Cold War shaped the evolution of U.S. policy on control of the bomb.

Chapter 2 traces the origins of Eisenhower's plan for peaceful nuclear cooperation, the creation of the IAEA and its safeguards system, and the early development of the civil nuclear market. The chapter emphasizes the multiple motivations behind the shift from denial to cooperation, which served important U.S. foreign policy and commercial interests in addition to nonproliferation.

Chapter 3 reviews the development of NATO nuclear relations in the 1950s and early 1960s, focusing on the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, the decision to aid the British nuclear weapons program but not the French, and the alliance crises over nuclear sharing and the Multilateral Force (MLF). This chapter shows how changing U.S. assessments of the risks and requirements of extended deterrence influenced nonproliferation policy under the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations.

Chapter 4 reviews U.S. policy in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) negotiations, with emphasis on the treaty's stressful impact on U.S.-European relations. The chapter shows how U.S. pursuit of the NPT meshed with two broader themes of U.S. foreign policy in the mid-1960s—superpower *détente* and an expansive, interventionist concept of U.S. global security interests (epitomized by the intervention in Vietnam).

Chapter 5 explores further the relationship between U.S. foreign commitments and nonproliferation in the 1960s and early 1970s. The cases of Israel and India are examined to show the dilemmas and cross-pressures affecting U.S. nonproliferation policy and the changing premises of U.S. policy from the Kennedy-Johnson era globalism to the Nixon administration's emphasis on multipolarity and greater self-help by U.S. allies and clients.

Chapter 6 analyzes the Ford and Carter nonproliferation initiatives and the controversies they inspired in the foreign policy context of the mid- and late 1970s. The chapter focuses especially on the debate over plutonium use between the United States and its allies and the attempt to prevent a nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan. Its main theme is the gap between the more ambitious nonproliferation policy adopted at this time and the decline of U.S. influence due to the diffusion of global power, the energy crisis, and post-Vietnam U.S. retrenchment.

Chapter 7 reviews U.S. policy in the 1980s, showing how the renewal of Cold War tensions after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—and the Reagan commitment to a reassertion of U.S. power overseas—led to a reduced priority for nonproliferation policy. The chapter analyzes the links between anti-Soviet and nonproliferation policies toward South Asia, the Middle East, and China, as well as changes in U.S. policy on civil nuclear cooperation and plutonium use under Reagan.

Chapter 8 reviews the major historical patterns revealed by the study, and addresses the problems of integrating nonproliferation and other national interests in the post-Cold War world. With particular reference to the Persian Gulf war, it considers the implications of the Cold War's end for the dynamics of the proliferation threat, its impact on U.S. interests, and the possibilities for U.S. and multilateral nonproliferation policies.

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PETER A. CLAUSEN

Postscript: Early in the summer of 1991, Dr. Peter Clausen passed away. In his final weeks, Peter asked a long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Steven Baker, of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, to help in updating and revising portions of this book. The Union of Concerned Scientists gratefully acknowledges Dr. Baker's very generous help. UCS would also like to thank the following reviewers, who provided helpful comments about the manuscript: Timothy Luke, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Timothy Lomperis, Duke University; and Curtis Reithel, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

About the Author

On June 24, 1991, Dr. Peter Clausen passed away at the age of 46 after a long struggle with cancer. From 1983 until his death, he was director of research for the Union of Concerned Scientists, overseeing most of the organization's policy analyses on nuclear arms control, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and nuclear proliferation issues.

A nationally known expert on nuclear proliferation, Dr. Clausen became involved in the field as a political analyst with the Central Intelligence Agency in the mid-1970s and later as a nuclear specialist with the U.S. Department of Energy. Dr. Clausen was coauthor of two major UCS assessments of SDI, *The Fallacy of Star Wars* and *Empty Promise: The Growing Case Against Star Wars*. He also directed two major UCS arms control reports, *In Search of Stability* and *Presidential Priorities: A National Security Agenda for the 1990s*. He received a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California at Los Angeles.

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Chapter **1**

The Monopoly Era: The Bomb and Russia in American Policy 1945–1950

As World War II ended, American diplomacy came face to face with two enormous challenges. One was the Soviet Union, which had emerged from the war as the dominant power in Europe. The other was the atomic bomb, whose awesome destructiveness had been demonstrated at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both had been keys to victory over the Axis, but both now cast ominous shadows over the postwar landscape. Either challenge alone would have been daunting. But the task was not only to manage them both at once, but to deal with each in relation to the other. For it was clear that the fate of U.S.-Soviet relations and the future of the bomb were intimately connected.

Little else was clear, however, including the nature of the two problems themselves. A basic question was whether either could be managed within the framework of traditional statecraft. Was the Soviet Union an ideological power committed to world revolution, or a conventional great power with which the West could do business? Did the atomic bomb transform world politics, making nationalism and war obsolete, or was it simply a new and more powerful military weapon?

The situation seemed to require a choice as to which posed the greater danger: To define one as the problem implied that the other was part of the solution. The belief that the Soviet Union was the overriding threat to American security led inexorably to the view that the bomb was a national resource, not to be shared. The belief that the bomb was the greater threat called for partnership with the Soviet Union to control atomic energy.

The logic of the Cold War finally prevailed. The failure of the Baruch Plan (which would have subjected atomic energy to international control)

and the passage of the 1946 Atomic Energy Act (which sought to preserve the American monopoly through secrecy and denial) marked the first watershed of U.S. nonproliferation policy. For the first but hardly the last time, a grand design for controlling the bomb fell victim to Cold War realities. Meanwhile, nuclear weapons were assuming a central role in U.S. security policy—tentatively at first, but decisively by the end of the decade. By then, the American atomic monopoly had been broken; the Soviet Union had joined the nuclear club and Great Britain was waiting in the wings.

The brief monopoly era was in a sense the prehistory of U.S. nonproliferation policy. Behind the heated debates on international control, there had been little systematic thinking about how the bomb's spread would actually affect international relations and U.S. national interests. Theorizing about such questions was made difficult by the bomb's novelty and by the special nature of the first two cases of proliferation—America's bitterest adversary, and its closest ally. Nevertheless, these formative years foreshadowed many of the problems the United States would later face in attempting to reconcile nonproliferation with its broader foreign policy agenda.

DEBATING NUCLEAR POLICY, 1945

The debate on postwar control of the bomb, begun even before the weapon had been tested and used, emerged in the fall of 1945 as a contest between two sharply differing approaches. On one side were the proponents of international control, who regarded nuclear weapons as the dominant security threat of the postwar world and argued that, unless they were removed from national hands, proliferation and nuclear wars were inevitable. On the other were advocates of a nationalist policy, who saw the bomb as America's "winning weapon" and urged a policy aimed at exploiting and protecting the U.S. monopoly.¹

The technical and political assumptions of the two groups were in large part mirror images of each other. Advocates of internationalism dismissed the possibility that the United States could monopolize the bomb, and placed their hopes on U.S.-Soviet collaboration. Nuclear nationalists disparaged cooperation with Russia and envisioned a long and fruitful era of U.S. monopoly. It was as if hard-headed realism on one issue induced naive credulity on the other.

Support for international control had been building during the final stages of the war. Within the inner circle of U.S. defense research

¹ See Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982). The phrase is from Bernard Baruch's speech to the UN Atomic Energy Commission, June 14, 1946: "Before a country is ready to relinquish any winning weapons, it must have more than words to reassure it."

advisors, the idea was championed by Vannevar Bush and James Conant—the White House science advisor, and the president of Harvard, respectively—who in September 1944 urged Secretary of War Henry Stimson to begin planning for the postwar management of atomic energy.² Manhattan Project scientists were also a center of advocacy for an international approach. The June 1945 Franck Report, which had argued in vain against use of the bomb on Japan, was a key manifesto. “Unless an effective international control of nuclear explosives is instituted,” the scientists argued, “a race for nuclear armaments is certain to ensue following the first revelation of our possession of nuclear weapons to the world.”³ As the war ended, Stimson embraced this view and recommended it to President Harry Truman.

At a special cabinet meeting on September 21, 1945, the day of his retirement, Stimson offered a proposal for direct negotiations with the Soviet Union on atomic control.⁴ In his memorandum to President Truman describing the plan, Stimson squarely identified the bomb as the central issue of U.S.-Soviet relations: “To put the matter concisely, I consider the problem of our satisfactory relations with Russia as not merely connected with but as virtually dominated by the problem of the atomic bomb. . . . Those relations may be perhaps irretrievably embittered by the way in which we approach the solution of the bomb with Russia.”⁵

Stimson described a basic choice between treating the bomb as a traditional (though devastating) military weapon, “to be assimilated into our pattern of international relations,” and treating it as something “too revolutionary and dangerous to fit into old concepts.” Rejecting the first, he argued against the allures of atomic monopoly—the temptation to use America’s “momentary superiority,” either for diplomatic leverage in the ongoing peace talks (“having this weapon rather ostentatiously on our hip,” in Stimson’s often-quoted phrase) or for military advantage to offset Soviet power in Europe. The attempt to exploit the monopoly would not only fail, Stimson claimed, but would simply hasten its end, stimulating “feverish activity on the part of the Soviet [sic] toward the development of

² Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, Jr., *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission. Volume I: The New World, 1939–46* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press), pp. 325–31.

³ On the atomic scientists’ movement, see Alice Kimball Smith, *A Peril and A Hope* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965). The Franck report is printed in Appendix B, p. 560. During the war, these concerns had been vigorously pressed by Niels Bohr, who argued in vain with Churchill and Roosevelt for a sharing of work on the bomb with the Soviet Union. See Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986) pp. 522–38.

⁴ See Herken, *The Winning Weapon*, pp. 27ff., and Hewlett and Anderson, *The New World*, pp. 418–21.

⁵ Reprinted in Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), pp. 643–46.

this bomb in what will in effect be a secret armament race of a rather desperate character.” Nor was there promise in using atomic cooperation as a “carrot” to open up the Soviet political system, a strategy Stimson himself had earlier advocated.

Instead, Stimson called for an immediate approach to the Soviets, without preconditions, aimed at establishing a cooperative partnership for the control of atomic energy. Specifically, the United States would offer to cease its atomic weapons program if the Soviets (and British) would do the same, and to impound its existing bombs. The three countries might then enter into an agreement to cooperate in the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Stimson stressed the importance of approaching the Russians directly rather than at the United Nations, where the offer would be mired in “loose debates” among “nations who have not demonstrated their potential power or responsibility,” and would not be taken seriously by the Soviets.

Stimson granted that there were risks in cooperation: “We may be gambling on their good faith and risk their getting into production of bombs a little sooner than they would otherwise.” But this, he argued, was not a compelling objection to his plan. The Soviets would acquire the bomb in any case, and the timing of that event was less significant than the character of the Soviet Union and its relationship with the West when it did occur. A sincere offer of cooperation could open the way for a far-reaching improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations; a monopoly policy would only reinforce Soviet hostility and suspicion. “The only way you can make a man trustworthy is to trust him,” Stimson claimed, “and the surest way to make him untrustworthy is to distrust him and show your distrust.”

Stimson’s proposal, despite the endorsement of Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, generally met with a skeptical, if not hostile, reception.⁶ To many in the administration and the military, as in Congress and the public at large, giving up the bomb was unthinkable and the virtues of monopoly self-evident. Influential advocates of this view were Manhattan Project director General Leslie Groves and Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal.

Politically, the opponents of cooperation shared a distrust of Russia and an assumption that the postwar U.S.-Soviet relationship would be adversarial. An offer to cooperate on atomic energy, they argued, would be interpreted by Stalin as a sign of weakness; instead of allaying his insecurities, it would encourage him to challenge the West all the harder. Thus Forrestal dismissed Stimson’s plan as a dubious attempt “to buy [the Soviets’] understanding and sympathy. We tried that once with Hitler,” he wrote. “There are no returns on appeasement.”⁷

George Kennan, then serving at the U.S. embassy in Moscow and already deeply pessimistic about postwar U.S.-Soviet relations, shared

⁶ For Acheson’s support, see “Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman,” *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1945, Vol. 2, pp. 48–50.

⁷ Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 96.

Forrestal's misgivings. Four years later, Kennan would become a convert to international control, but in 1945 he regarded the Stimson plan as dangerously naive and "a frivolous neglect of the vital interests of our people."⁸ He was scornful of Stimson's belief that a "friendly" American overture would significantly affect Stalin's calculations and help steer Soviet nuclear policy along cooperative lines. "There is nothing—I repeat nothing—in the history of the Soviet regime," he cabled Washington,

which could justify us in assuming that the men who are now in power in Russia, or even those who have chances of assuming power within the foreseeable future, would hesitate for a moment to apply this power against us if by doing so they thought that they would materially improve their own power position in the world. This holds true regardless of the process by which the Soviet government might obtain the knowledge of the use of such forces, i.e., whether by its own scientific and inventive efforts, by espionage, or by such knowledge being imparted to them as a gesture of good will and confidence.⁹

In Kennan's view, the nature of the Soviet state made cooperation unthinkable on a matter as sensitive as atomic energy. Others' reasons for opposing sharing went beyond distrust of the Soviets; in their view, the atomic bomb was a key to the advancement of U.S. interests in the postwar world. This was a theme with many variations, having in common a reversal of Stimson's priorities: Instead of trying to enlist the Soviets in managing the nuclear threat, the object was to use the bomb to counter the Soviet threat. To this group, international control was undesirable whether or not it was feasible.

In military terms, the bomb was already being regarded by some as the lynchpin of future U.S. security, essential to countering Soviet power in Europe and Asia. Although they would not prevail for another two years, advocates of an "air-atomic" strategy were already pressing for a nuclear-based defense policy. They saw the bomb as an ideal opportunity to exploit America's technological advantages and compensate for its weaknesses, particularly in the area of manpower. Postwar demobilization was in full swing (reducing U.S. armed forces from 12 million at the time of the German surrender to 3 million a year later), and Congress was firmly opposed to reinstituting the draft. Nuclear weapons seemed to offer a way of offsetting the Soviets' huge land armies without the economic and political costs of remobilization.

The bomb also held temptations as a negotiating lever, particularly for Secretary of State James Byrnes. As Stimson was warning against bargaining with the bomb "on our hip," Byrnes was at the London Foreign Ministers Conference intending to do just that—hoping to use "nuclear diplomacy" to force Soviet concessions on peace settlement issues. His hopes were quickly disappointed, however. The Soviets, he learned at

⁸ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925–50* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 312.

⁹ Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925–50*.