

Don Cook

The Art of Non-Proliferation

Letter from Geneva

"Certainly it seems now that nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the early twentieth century... And as certainly they did not see it. They did not see it until the atomic bombs burst in their fumbling hands."

H. G. WELLS (1914)

THE SITUATION HERE is one of sour pettiness, and it characterises East-West relations in general and Soviet-American relations in particular. This is continuously exposed and exhibited in the interminable Geneva debates over a "Treaty to Halt the Spread of Nuclear Weapons," known for short, as only experts can know it, as non-proliferation.

This dismal deterioration of atmosphere is all the more unfortunate because there is no "grand confrontation" going on in the world between the two super-powers which would account for it or justify it. There is the nasty and squalid war in South Viet Nam, but the Soviet Union and the United States are not "eyeball-to-eyeball" anywhere and they are not indulging in useless head-bashing or military threats and posturing of the kind that marked Berlin, Cuba and the fierce days of the Cold War. In fact, on the whole they are getting on with the business of competitive co-existence in a fairly peaceful way. Moreover, the Soviet Union has stated repeatedly and publicly in Geneva that not only is the Viet Nam war no obstacle to the conclusion of a non-proliferation

treaty; indeed *because* of the Viet Nam war the Soviet Union says that it thinks such a treaty is "all the more desirable."

But this having been said, the language and style of the old inflexible diplomacy nevertheless goes right on, and with it all of that old Cold War niggardliness—sterile, futile, and sour. In Russia this is characterised by the wretched affair of Gerald Brooke, still languishing in a Siberian labour camp for taking with him to the Soviet Union a propaganda-filled photo album which had most probably been planted on him by a Russian double-agent in Britain.

Before that there was the tragic case of James Mott, the young American who strayed across the Norwegian-Russian frontier in the woods of the far north, cheerfully turned himself in to the Russian authorities, and in the end committed suicide or was killed in a fight with his Russian guards in a prison train on his way to serve a three-year jail sentence. The State Department responded to this with a bitter leaflet warning American tourists against visiting the Soviet Union. And then that ageing guardian of American liberties, John Edgar Hoover, managed to frighten President Johnson and the U.S. Congress out of ratifying a laboriously-negotiated consular treaty with Russia which would at least offer the possibility of preventing such tragedies as the Mott case. (But Hoover says the FBI has enough work to do without having to watch a lot of new Soviet consulates from coast-to-coast.)

In Geneva this pettiness and sourness takes the form of endless Russian attacks on West Germany, couched in the tired old language of Stalin, Khrushchev and company.

"The Federal Republic of Germany has

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embarked on a revision of the results of the war and the resurrection of the German *Reich*," ran one of these familiar scripts (they hardly change a word) from Andrei Roshchin who became the new chief Soviet disarmament negotiator last April.

The Federal Government has delivered a note to other governments making a claim for changing the existing European frontiers. This document, advertised as being sort of "an act of good-will" demonstrates that the Federal Government intends to follow a revanchist course. . . . It is with this in view that a broad programme of militarisation of Western Germany which employs the largest military force in Western Europe has been embarked upon. European security should envisage the creation of conditions which would eliminate forever the possibility of a repeated German aggression. In this connection it is necessary to stress the peaceful policy of the German Democratic Republic. . . .

This tedious kind of "our-Germans-are-better-than-your-Germans" nonsense usually has a dulling, dismaying effect on the other delegations who are making noble efforts to believe that they really are in Geneva to negotiate a treaty. One Western delegate, when he sees the propaganda machines being wheeled into action, makes a point of countering by conspicuously dozing off during the tirade. But surely there comes a time when no intelligent man can remain indifferent, or aloof, or asleep any longer.

Lord Chalfont, the chief British negotiator, who certainly shows forbearance above and beyond the call of duty, finally had enough by the time the talks recessed for a month in early May. He turned on the Russians and lashed out at their "single-minded, obsessive and vengeful campaign" against West Germany; their "myopic and doctrinaire refusal to see where the real danger lies"; and Russia's apparent determination "to regard a non-proliferation treaty as a measure directed almost exclusively against one country, the Federal Republic of Germany."

If we cannot stop the spread of nuclear weapons, and stop it soon, we may find that all other programmes on disarmament are blocked, perhaps forever.

Chalfont is certainly right. The Russians do seem to be obsessed with stopping West Germany from getting any kind of "partial possession" or "partial control" over nuclear weapons, even though in fact the immediate danger of nuclear proliferation obviously lies elsewhere—

India threatened by China, Israel versus Egypt, Sweden, to name four countries which could proceed fairly rapidly from peaceful to military nuclear production if they choose. Moreover, Chalfont and the other delegates in Geneva are becoming more and more depressed at the fact that "the last chance" to get the disarmament problem in hand seems to be slowly but steadily slipping away. It is increasingly obvious that if some way cannot be found to lift this relatively simple problem of a non-proliferation treaty out of its present sterile atmosphere, then it is going to be impossible to move on to more complicated matters such as a ban on underground nuclear testing.

THIS IS A PRACTICAL as well as a political problem. The present series of talks has been in progress, off and on, since March 1962, when this 17-nation United Nations committee first met to take over the work of the old 10-nation disarmament conference of the 1950s. The work of that group had been halted in 1960 by an abrupt Russian walk-out. In the enlarged committee which has been at it now for four years, nations such as Brazil, Burma, Ethiopia, Mexico and Nigeria clearly do not have any great technical interest or lively political role to play. They naturally enjoy the prestige of membership, but it costs money to maintain delegations in Geneva and it takes trained senior diplomatic personnel. Both are short among the smaller nations; and among the smaller powers patience with the larger powers is also beginning to run short.

Disarmament is a complicated technical subject, and no matter how frustrating or slow-moving the discussions might be, governments nevertheless have to keep good career men on the job. Delegates have to be steeped in all of the background and paper-work in order to advise and take decisions. It is not easy for small governments who badly need good people elsewhere to tie up men and money sitting in Geneva listening to Mr. Rashchin denounce the evil-eyed revanchists of West Germany and Mr. Foster of the United States wearily defending the NATO alliance and the virtues of a multi-lateral nuclear force.

Along the way in the last four years, these Geneva talks have produced (1) the all-important nuclear atmospheric Test Ban treaty and (2) the "Hot Line" communications link between Washington and Moscow. But the hopes which these agreements brought to

Geneva are fading fast and the momentum is running down. If things do not begin to look appreciably brighter by the time this round of talks terminates (at the end of the summer) for a report back to the annual UN General Assembly in New York, then it is highly doubtful if there will be enough votes or enthusiasm in the UN to send the delegates back for another try.

The situation is all the more dispiriting because the longer the argument goes on over whether or not West Germany is to be allowed to come into some form of ownership of "nuclear hardware" under a non-proliferation treaty, the more obvious it becomes that this is really a "non-problem." The United States is trying with rather pathetic ingenuity to keep the door open for some future nuclear weapons-sharing arrangement with West Germany and the Russians are trying just as hard to slam it shut and lock it tight. In fact, they are engaged in a pointless and unreal debate about something which is now totally unlikely ever to happen anyway.

IT IS A SIMPLE political fact of life in Western Europe today that the whole idea of any kind of nuclear hardware-sharing arrangement between the U.S.A. and West Germany is now far too explosive and divisive in the NATO alliance ever to be attempted at all. Quite probably there are many American and West German policy-makers who would not agree with that statement—but if they try to proceed down the road to a "hardware solution" on nuclear weapons they will quickly find out.

In the first place, it is quite wrong to assume that because President Charles de Gaulle has now removed France from military participation in NATO, the "biggest obstacle" which stood in the way of the old multilateral nuclear force proposal in 1963-4 is gone. France's capacity for strong reaction against Germany is as operative as ever and in fact may well be even stronger now that she is no longer bound by NATO conviviality. In 1964, De Gaulle came very close to threatening an abrogation of the Franco-German treaty if West Germany were to join the *M.L.F.* He would certainly react violently again today if it began to look as if the United States were about to enter into some "part-ownership-and-control" arrangements to give West Germany a share in nuclear hardware. Any number of moves would have to be

reckoned with: final French denunciation of the NATO Treaty or of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship; a new Franco-Soviet treaty; French recognition of East Germany; a French pull-out from Berlin. These would be enormous diplomatic and political risks for the West German government and the U.S. government to take, and General de Gaulle's supposed new "freedom of action" outside NATO makes the risks greater rather than less.

As for the other NATO countries, it is perfectly clear (or, at least, ought to be clear in Washington by now) that Harold Wilson and the British Labour Government have been fighting a long rear-guard delaying action against the idea of a "hardware solution" and have put an absolute priority on getting a non-proliferation treaty. Now that everyone recognises that the *M.L.F.* is dead, the British would like it also recognised that even their own less complicated "Allied Nuclear Force" plan (*A.N.F.*) is now awaiting respectable burial.

Italy which always makes interested noises when the subject of nuclear sharing comes up is nevertheless governed by a left-centre coalition in which the Nenni Socialists have been the key to a successful partnership. The Nenni Socialists persuaded themselves to join a pro-NATO government on the basis of the theory that NATO is now not so much a military alliance as it is an essential element of stability in Europe. This would seem to be a sensible and logical line for the Italian government to take; but does Washington or Bonn really expect that given this attitude, the Nenni Socialists would ever agree to a nuclear weapons-sharing scheme which would be opposed violently by France and Russia? It would be the end of Italy's left-centre coalition.

The Norwegians and the Danes have been strongly against nuclear weapons-sharing for West Germany from the start. The Belgians, despite Paul-Henri Spaak's personal feelings, declined to support the *M.L.F.* scheme. Holland went along without enthusiasm. Greece and Turkey were both in on the original *M.L.F.*, and then Turkey pulled out.

In short, the indifference and inertia in NATO towards nuclear weapons-sharing is complete, and any purely German-American scheme would be politically disastrous for the alliance. Nevertheless, the West Germans and the Americans solemnly go on proclaiming that "the option must be kept open for Germany." Hence the deadlock in Geneva.

TO KEEP THE OPTION OPEN, the United States has tabled a draft of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty which reads as if it had been written with a ball-point corkscrew. Its key wording is as follows:

Each of the nuclear-weapon states party to this treaty undertakes...not to transfer nuclear weapons into the national control of any non-nuclear-weapon state or into the control of any association of non-nuclear weapon states...not to take any other action which would cause an increase in the total number of states and associations of states having control of nuclear weapons.

The draft goes on to define "control" as meaning the "right or ability to fire nuclear weapons without the concurrent decision of an existing nuclear-weapon state."

The effect of this treaty draft is to allow a state possessing nuclear weapons to join an "association of non-nuclear-weapon states" which would then become the joint owners of nuclear weapons with the ultimate control over the firing of the weapons remaining in the hands of the "nuclear weapon state." In the sacred name of non-proliferation, there would thus be no increase in the total number of so-called "Nuclear Entities" in the world. But while the United States is having its *M.L.F.* with Germany, France could have an *M.L.F.* with Israel—China could have an *M.L.F.* with Indonesia or North Viet Nam—Russia could have an *M.L.F.* with Poland—and if that would not constitute "proliferation of nuclear weapons" then the multi-language interpreting system in Geneva has totally broken down. It seems to me pointless if not downright silly for the Americans to have to argue solemnly that they would of course expect the "control arrangements" in any such proliferation of little *M.L.F.*s around the world to be absolutely a tight and sophisticated as the arrangements which have been envisaged in nuclear weapons-sharing schemes between Washington and Bonn. Even partial ownership implies the right to use or seek to use. That is why the Russians behave almost pathologically on this question with regard to the Germans.

BUT WHILE THE United States devotes ingenious language to a treaty draft which will keep the door open for an eventuality which is wholly unlikely ever to happen, the Soviet Union draft-treaty is just as unrealistic in the opposite direction—for it seeks to dictate what NATO can

do or cannot do in organising its nuclear defence.

Parties to the treaty possessing nuclear weapons, [says the Soviet draft] undertake not to transfer such weapons in any form—directly or indirectly, through third states or groups of states—to the ownership or control of states or groups of states not possessing nuclear weapons, and not to accord to such states or groups of states the right to participate in the ownership, control or use of nuclear weapons. The said parties to the treaty shall not transfer nuclear weapons or control over them or over their emplacement and use, to units of the armed forces or military personnel of states not possessing nuclear weapons, even if such units or personnel are under the command of a military alliance.

Taken at its full, literal impact, this language would give the Russians the right to demand the removal of all American nuclear warheads from Europe; and not even the Danes or Norwegians find that acceptable. The Soviet draft is nothing more nor less than an effort to break up NATO's internal defence arrangements under the guise of preventing West Germany from coming into partial ownership of nuclear weapons. The Soviet negotiating position is no more realistic than the American-German position.

What, then, are the chances of a non-proliferation agreement? Can the unreal debate over a non-problem be suspended and a solution found?

THE SIMPLE PRAGMATIC solution would be for both sides to step back and *ignore* the "German syndrome." If Russia's chief diplomatic aim in Geneva is to block the West Germans from obtaining nuclear hardware, then the best way they could achieve it would be to sign a non-proliferation treaty in almost any wording. Any kind of treaty will obviously serve to reinforce the present inertia and opposition in NATO which already makes nuclear hardware-sharing a practical impossibility. Any kind of treaty will tend to stabilise the existing situation and improve the East-West atmosphere. It would become a self-denying ordinance against any further steps towards weapons-sharing in NATO no matter what the formal terms.

Can the Russians be persuaded to give up their attempts to get treaty language which would enable them to intervene in the internal defence arrangements of the NATO alliance? The West

is not so foolish as to waste time trying to interfere in Warsaw Pact arrangements, and NATO will certainly remain united in rejecting such attempts by Russia. At the same time, can the Americans be persuaded to abandon their tortuous language involving "associations of non-nuclear-weapon states" by which they are trying to write the German option into the treaty?

Is it inconceivable that the two sides step back and settle on very simple straightforward uncomplicated language? It could be a clause as simple as this:

Parties to the treaty possessing nuclear weapons undertake not to transfer such weapons into the national ownership or control of states or groups of states not possessing nuclear weapons.

Such a formulation merely records the present situation and does not attempt either to forecast or foreclose the future. Should the circumstances arise in Germany, in NATO, or in the general state of East-West relations in which some "hardware solution" seems necessary and desirable, the option is still there.

It is there first of all because such treaty language would ban the "national ownership and control" but it does not ban partial ownership in which control would continue to rest with the nuclear power providing the weapons. In any case, the "German option" is kept open by a "national interest" clause which appears in parallel form in both the Soviet and American drafts. In the Russian draft it reads:

Each party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the treaty if it decides that extraordinary events relating to the subject matter of this treaty have jeopardised the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such a withdrawal to all other parties to the treaty three months in advance.

The Russians would be free to protect their position under this clause. If they felt so compelled, they simply could state after signing the treaty that if any mixed-ownership weapons-sharing scheme were to be advanced in NATO, then the Soviet Union would consider this grounds for denouncing the treaty.

Above all, the importance of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty clearly does not at all lie in its terms or language—but in the simple fact that there is at long last a political agreement between the two super-powers. The terms are superfluous to the fact of agreement. Nor does

it matter a great deal that China and France will not sign; that India, Israel and Egypt will all hesitate; that West Germany will not want to have its name on a document which East Germany also signs; that the treaty has no policing machinery, no sanctions, no security clauses or guarantees. All these arguments and questions fade into insignificance alongside the historic fact that Russia and the United States would have managed to sign a piece of paper which simply and sanely agrees to go on doing what they are doing anyway, *i.e.* refusing to turn their nuclear weapons over to anybody else.

MEANWHILE, THE SO-CALLED "NATO McNamara Committee" on nuclear plans and strategy goes on, with West German membership. Already its work has demonstrated one salient fact—that even if the *M.L.F.* were in existence today, there would still have to be a consultative committee of this kind to work out plans and strategy for the use of weapons and the whole process of decision-making. The Russians can do nothing about the McNamara committee, and no matter how much they vilify it in *Izvestia* and at the conference table in Geneva, they have to accept the fact that it is a purely internal NATO arrangement which is going to go right on. It does *not* involve any proliferation of nuclear weapons and it is no bar to negotiating a treaty or an excuse for not signing such a treaty. Proliferation of committees is far better than proliferation of weapons.

It is a moot question, except to the committed theologians, how truly important and vital this "nuclear option" really is for West Germany. Generally speaking, the people who argue most emotionally and fervently about the importance of Germany's option are Americans and not Germans. Of course key officials and ministers of the Bonn Government state repeatedly that "the option must be kept open." But having said these fairly *pro forma* lines, they have not been seen rushing to the platforms or into print to argue the case with much passion or conviction.

In the end, the "German syndrome" seems to reduce itself to the fact that it would cause infinite complications and probably even great political harm if West Germany were ever to come into partial ownership of nuclear weapons—but it would cause reverse complications and political troubles if West Germany were flatly told that she could never have nuclear weapons.

Therefore, to ignore doing either is to ensure that nothing will happen—and this, I submit, is no bad solution. It is a “solution” which will become more and more attractive to German politicians and diplomats as they become increasingly involved with the politics of reunification. It is a “solution,” moreover, which if it could be translated into a non-proliferation treaty would help to lift East-West relations out of the sour pettiness which steadily worsens; and this new turn would be reflected in the atmosphere of the German reunification problem.

But the longer the present pettiness goes on, the more it begins to infuse diplomats and legislators and civil servants and government ministers, and the more difficult it will be to check and control. Already its effect can be seen on the Soviet-American consular treaty and, again, in the rebuff which President Johnson received from the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee over his proposal to increase U.S. trade with the Eastern bloc.

Ahead of both the United States and the Soviet Union, apparently, lies the terrible multi-billion dollar decision as to whether to begin building and deploying vast Anti-Ballistic Missile defence systems. Can either side start

such a programme without the other side finding out about it very rapidly? And when one side starts, won't the other feel compelled to follow? So the upward spiral goes.

At Geneva there is still a chance to renew the contract of mutual self-interest which began with the Test Ban treaty. It is not a problem of language. It is not a problem of negotiation. It is only a problem of common sense and political will.

Or as Rhedi wrote to Usbek in Paris in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721), “You know that since the invention of gunpowder, there is no impregnable city, which is to say, Usbek, that there is no asylum on earth against violence and injustice. I am ever trembling lest someone should fall upon some secret that makes possible a shortened path to the destruction of men, peoples, and entire nations. . . .”

And Usbek replied to Rhedi in Venice, “You fear, you say, that some crueller method of destruction than that now used will be invented. No. If a fatal invention were to be made, it would soon be outlawed by international law, and unanimous agreement among nations would bury the discovery. Princes have no interest in conquering by such means. . . .”

A Bright Day

At times I see it, present
As a bright day, or a hill,
The only way of saying something
Luminously as possible.

Not the accumulated richness
Of an old historical language—
That musk-deep odour!
But a slow exactness

Which recreates experience
By ritualising its details—
Colour of curtain, width
Of table, till all

Take on a witch-bright glow
And even the clock on the mantel
Moves its hands in a fierce delight
Of so, and so, and so.

John Montague