

"THE NUCLEAR OBSESSION"

Princeton, N. J.

Dear Sir: The series of articles on "Nuclear Obsession" by Jack Walker have introduced many fresh and fascinating ramifications of politics in a nuclear age. In the fourth article on "Nuclear 'Efficiency'" (*worldview*, March), however, the author seems to have lost his grip. He seems himself to be obsessed with nuclear obsession.

By this I mean that Mr. Walker is able to perceive only one sort of "dichotomy between political and military activities," only one way by which experts can reject "a sensible amalgamation of political and military insights into specific international problems." The sort of "obsession" Mr. Walker rejects is the manner in which, he asserts, American planners think and talk in purely "military" terms.

This leads him to favor "the French approach" to nuclear problems. According to this approach, nuclear weapons are "hardly military at all"; they afford a nation only "a certain augmentation of political influence in international relations." Consequently, the French "devote virtually all their attention to the political and psychological problems of deterrence."

This is to espouse a far more complete dichotomy between political and military activities than ever was championed by U. S. "technical" planners. Walker seems to espouse the views of General Pierre Gallois who recently announced that modern "scientific" weapons have *only* political uses: "the only thing you can do is sit on them" (*The New York Times*, April 12, 1967). He seems to share the argument that the way to insure deterrence is to increase the proliferation of nuclear weapons; and to endorse a *force de frappe* directed for its political ends mainly against the U. S., for the augmentation of France's political influence.

In an earlier article Mr. Walker rightly pointed out that if the U. S. signs a non-proliferation agreement with Russia, this treaty will be yet another step in détente between the U. S. and the USSR, and that this unavoidably will be directed *against* mainland China. That surely is one of the costs to be considered. Perhaps the "normalization" of our relations with Red China would be sufficient reason for our *not* signing such an agreement. This is only to say that, in regard to any political or military action, there are indirect as well as direct effects to be calculated in counting the costs and the benefits of doing anything. In the same sense, people who sponsor national days of

"prayer and fasting" to protest U. S. policy in Vietnam should think of the political fall-out they may not intend, in strengthening Hanoi's will to fight.

Still, these political considerations do not add up to the *separation* between political and military policies which Mr. Walker now seems to embrace in the course of proving American military planners — indeed also a few theologians — to be "obsessed" with the military aspects alone.

Here another "French view" may be introduced. The following statements of Raymond Aron should lead us to reflect that a number of U. S. analysts — and McNamara in 1962 — have been trying to *forge the link again* between force and policy, between the military and the political activities of a nation. Aron wrote in *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (Doubleday, 1966):

"Between the two antinomic theses, each of which has its partisans — peace through the generalization of thermonuclear deterrence and the dangers created by the enlargement of the atomic club — I do not hesitate to choose: the first is illusory, deceptively seductive, it has the characteristic appeal of sophistries. In short, *it is war which must be saved*, in other words, the possibility of tests of armed strength between states rather than eternal peace, which would have to be established by the constant threat of the thermonuclear holocaust."

"It is just as bizarre to imagine the industrial societies will live in peace because they will no longer have the means to fight as it is to imagine that they will live in peace because they will all have the means to destroy each other in a few moments. The seemingly opposite intellectual error is actually the same in both cases. The doctrine of peace by fear imagines an equality between states by the capacity of the weakest to deal the strongest mortal blow. The doctrine of peace by disarmament imagines the equality to consist of the inability of the strongest to coerce the weakest. Neither equality is obtainable."

"Such, in effect, is the first dilemma confronting statesmen in our age: do they wish to save war or save humanity from a certain war (thermonuclear war)? . . . *One cannot maintain that the thermonuclear holocaust is too horrible for anyone to launch it and at the same time count on the effectiveness of this*

threat in most circumstances. . . . There will arise a statesman who does not believe in a threat that the other party nonetheless made in earnest" (pp.640, 646; 649).

To "save war" for political purposes (and perhaps to save mankind from inherently purposeless violence) would be the exact opposite of concentration upon military "efficiency" alone.

PAUL RAMSEY

The Author Replies:

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir: One can always count on Paul Ramsey for a spirited challenge; may it continue to be so. In this instance, I do not believe we are as far apart as his remarks indicate at first glance.

First of all, I do not propose to decide which French thinker is closest to Mr. Ramsey's thinking, and which to mine. Raymond Aron goes to great lengths to show how much more sophisticated he is than General Gallois and, if only to preserve the normalities of civil-military discussions, I would agree. But it often is difficult to figure out just what Aron is driving at. In another recent book (*The Great Debate*, Doubleday, 1965), Aron notes that a close aide to President Kennedy identified him (Aron) in 1963 as "in favor of the dissemination of atomic weapons"; but, continues Aron, "I am not in favor of dissemination . . . as such" (p.237).

All weapons, of course, are both military and political. All I tried to say was that nuclear weapons are much more "political" than we Americans usually make them out to be. As Aron puts it, the "ultimate function" of nuclear weapons is "to prevent their own use" (p. 143), and this certainly has to be looked at as a "political" function. I am arguing that any nation is unlikely to use nuclear weapons against another nuclear nation except in the most "extreme circumstances" (Aron again, p. 135). I am arguing further that once it is decided to use such weapons, the conduct of the battle and its results will be much more "political" than "military." The war will most likely be "dirty" (against society), not "clean" (against weapons). This is what gives any nation having such weapons a certain amount of political leverage, but the same factor reduces the credibility of any nuclear guarantee extended to a third nation. This has been at least a major part of our recent problems in Europe, and we can hardly expect India, for example, to take seriously any guarantee we attempt to extend.

The quotation that Mr. Ramsey has italicized is, of course, the central paradox of nuclear weapons, pointed out more directly by Hans Morgenthau in his article in the *American Political Science Review* a few years ago. There are, nonetheless, some political circumstances in which the threat is credible because a prospective enemy knows that the weapons will be used.

At this point I think Mr. Ramsey and I are left only with a problem of jargon — a familiar one in recent years. It seems to me that I am arguing for the closest possible relationship between political and military factors, not for a dichotomy between them. Perhaps in using the French example, I overstated the case, for even if nuclear weapons are more closely related than any other weapons to the ultimate political purposes of a nation, they may not be wholly political in character. But they are mighty close to it, and they fall quite clearly in the category of "Give me liberty or give me death!" and "Better dead than Red!" Finally, the overall thrust of my essay is summed up in this sentence from its penultimate paragraph: "It is paradoxical to see such a dichotomy between political and military activities in a country that has been so lavish in its education of military leaders." I do not regard that as an argument for separation of politico-military factors.

About the ultimate effects of proliferation, I am not so certain. From what I have said before, I am dubious about the efficacy of a U.S.-U.S.S.R. "nuclear concert." I would hold that it is at least possible that proliferation could produce a more stable, rather than a less stable, world. After all, the U.S.-U.S.S.R. balance seems more stable than before each of us had nuclear weapons in any quantity. It is enough to say that I am not much disturbed at the development of the French deterrent.

JACK WALKER

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