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PROBABLE EFFECTS OF INCREASING NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES UPON THE POLICIES OF US ALLIES



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PROBABLE EFFECTS OF INCREASING NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES UPON THE POLICIES OF US ALLIES

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable effect upon the policies of the principal US allies of a general conviction that the US and the USSR each had acquired nuclear capabilities more than sufficient to cripple the other.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Nuclear weapons will not have been used in war since 1945.
2. No international agreement will have been made restricting or outlawing the use of nuclear weapons in war.

NOTE

This estimate applies primarily to the Western European allies of the US, though most of it holds true also for Japan, Turkey, and other allied countries. So numerous are the factors that would govern the policy of each allied government under the conditions of the problem, however, that no attempt can

usefully be made at present to estimate these policies for individual countries. This estimate is therefore stated in general terms. As the potentialities and implications of nuclear weapons become better understood in various countries, it may be possible to formulate more specific estimates.

CONCLUSIONS

1. A great and recognized growth in nuclear capabilities will obviously intensify the anxiety of peoples and governments to avoid war. No government will willingly run risks of war unless interests are at stake which it considers vital, and the threat of nuclear weapons will almost certainly tend to narrow the range of interests that any government will consider vital.

2. Under such circumstances, the difficulties presently felt in maintaining an effective Western coalition under US leadership may be increased, but we do not believe that the alliance will necessarily show significant weakness, at least as long as there does not seem to be a greatly increased likelihood of general war. The US allies will probably seek to obtain greater influence over US policy

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in order to ensure a cautious and non-provocative attitude toward the Communist states.

3. The alliance could receive a severe test, however, in connection with local aggression committed or supported by the Soviet Bloc. Fear already exists that strong reaction to such aggression might lead to general war. Fears of general war will be intensified when both great power blocs are believed to possess large nuclear capabilities. US allies would therefore be even more insistent than at present that every effort be made to limit the scope and area of local conflicts and to deal with local aggression without resorting to acts which might expand the conflict into general war. US allies generally would also be more unwilling than at present to participate in repelling local Communist aggression.

4. In the event of international crisis involving grave danger of general war, we believe that the allies would almost certainly support the US as long as they believed that firm maintenance of the alliance would probably avert war.

5. We cannot estimate the probable courses of action of US allies if an international crisis should develop to the point where general war seemed to them virtually certain and no longer to be

averted by firm maintenance of the alliance. There is inadequate evidence or precedent on which to calculate the reaction of governments and peoples who consider themselves to be facing imminent threat of attack with nuclear weapons. Among the factors influencing the courses of action of each nation, we believe that the following would be of most importance: (a) the estimate that the government and people would make of their chances of survival in the event of participation in general war; (b) the alternatives which would appear available at the time; (c) the political and social stability of the state, and the morale of its population; (d) the importance, to the state, of the issues at stake in the crisis; (e) the strength and cohesion of the alliance at the beginning of the crisis, and the degree of integration of its armed forces; and (f) the judgment which people and government had made of the wisdom and skill with which US policy had been conducted.

6. We believe that most allied governments, if confronted with certain national destruction as the sole alternative to an accommodation with the USSR, would choose the latter. We believe it unlikely, though possible, that the major allies of the US would become convinced that the alternatives facing them were so limited and so clear-cut as the two described.

DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

7. The tests of nuclear weapons recently carried out by the US and the USSR, and the publicity attending these tests, has produced a notable increase in public anxiety concerning these weapons. The considerable intensity of feeling on the subject presently observable in the UK, Japan, and elsewhere will

probably diminish. Nevertheless, as time goes on, and particularly as Soviet nuclear capabilities increase, a greater realization of the potentialities of these weapons will develop. Such realization will be based in part on misinformation; in part on the gradual dissemination of knowledge about nuclear weapons by Western governments and re-

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sponsible publicists. Soviet propaganda may contribute to the process. There will probably be many and varying interpretations placed upon the potentialities and limitations of the nuclear factor in modern warfare — correct and incorrect, reassuring and hysterical, hopeful and despairing. In any event, increasing awareness of the potentialities and implications of nuclear weapons will eventually exert a profound influence upon public and governmental opinion throughout the world. Fear of war, and anxiety to avoid war, will increase.

8. This intensified anxiety to avoid war may in turn affect the policies of governments. To be sure, the present policies of governments were not made in ignorance of the existence of nuclear weapons, or without attention to their significance and probable future development. The present policies of the allies of the US are therefore at least a partial guide to their probable future courses of action. Nevertheless, it is possible that popular pressures, even popular hysteria, arising out of an increasing realization of the destructiveness of nuclear weapons, might force changes in policy against the desires of governments. Moreover, some governments may under certain circumstances feel compelled to reappraise their policies in the light of their own increasing understanding of the implications of nuclear weapons. The likelihood of such changes of policy, and their probable nature, are examined in the following paragraphs.

II. PROBABLE EFFECTS DURING A PERIOD OF COLD WAR

9. The Western alliance system was established in a period of high international tension. It had as its primary purpose the prevention of war, while at the same time providing its members with protection against the danger of Communist expansion. It was based on the proposition that the Kremlin would be unlikely to launch general war, or to take actions which it considered to involve grave risks of general war, as long as the political and military power of the Soviet Bloc was at least approximately balanced, in an over-all fashion, by the power of an opposing coalition.

10. We see no reason to believe that this proposition will necessarily become less convincing to allied peoples and governments as the nuclear capabilities of the USSR increase. Indeed it may appear to have even more force than before, at least as long as there does not seem to be a greatly increased likelihood of general war. The prevention of war will become more desirable than ever. Moreover, most allied governments will continue to realize that membership in the alliance assures them of US interest in their general welfare and prosperity, and gives them a much greater voice in world affairs than they could have in isolation.

11. We therefore believe it probable that the Western alliance will endure despite the new element introduced into the world situation by the further development of nuclear weapons. The allies will almost certainly demand that US armed forces remain in Western Europe and in some parts of the Far East as evidence of continuing US determination to protect its allies, and of the strength and integrity of the alliance. With the exception of the UK and perhaps a few other countries, the allies will probably not acquire the capability to produce nuclear weapons. However, they will probably continue to play their role in the coalition by maintaining substantial military establishments, and will press for US aid for this purpose. US allies with no capability of producing nuclear weapons will probably eventually request the US to supply them with these weapons for use by their own armed forces or to make these weapons available for use under the control of NATO. Allies who have or intend to acquire a capability to produce these weapons will press the US for an exchange of information and a more complete integration of nuclear development and production within the alliance.

12. Nevertheless, as the increasingly disastrous consequences of war become more generally recognized, the allies will even more closely scrutinize the alliance to ensure that it in fact serves to prevent war. This may on many occasions make it more difficult for the US to exert vigorous leadership:

a. The allies will almost certainly seek to obtain greater influence over US policy toward

the USSR and Communist China, in order to ensure a cautious and non-provocative attitude toward the Communist states.

b. The allies will become more fearful that in pursuing its national interests or in response to domestic pressures the US may adopt courses of action involving, in the allies' opinion, undue risks of war. Each ally will try to ensure that no appreciable risk of war is run except to protect interests which it considers vital to its own national survival.

c. Increasing nuclear capabilities will place the USSR in a stronger position to exert pressures upon most non-Communist governments.

13. The alliance could receive a severe test in connection with local aggression committed or supported by the Soviet Bloc. Fear already exists that strong reaction to such aggression might lead to general war. Fears of general war will be intensified when both great power blocs are believed to possess large nuclear capabilities. US allies would, therefore, be even more insistent than at present that every effort be made to limit the scope and area of local conflicts and to deal with local aggression without resorting to acts which might expand the conflict into general war. US allies generally would also be more unwilling than at present to participate in repelling local Communist aggression.

14. On the other hand, the allies of the US will be sensitive to any indication that the US is unwilling, in the face of Soviet nuclear capabilities, to resort to war in their defense. If at some time in the future they should become convinced that the principal deterrent to Soviet attack upon them had been removed by such a change in US policy, at least some allies would, in the face of Soviet pressure, abandon the alliance and seek an accommodation with the USSR.

15. The great and probably increasing aversion to the use of nuclear weapons may also create difficulties for US policy. There is at present a fairly widespread hope that nuclear weapons will never actually be used again in war. This hope may vanish, but there is likely to be a strong desire among US allies to

maintain, as long as possible, whatever moral and political inhibitions may exist against the use of these weapons. Except when their own most vital interests are at stake, US allies will probably seek to prevent the use of nuclear weapons in local conflicts.

16. It is almost certain that as Soviet nuclear capabilities increase and as the implications of this increase are better realized, popular pressures will grow for some kind of agreement restricting or outlawing the use of nuclear weapons. For example, there might be strong public demand for a pact with the USSR in which both sides undertook at least not to use such weapons against large centers of population. Such a demand might rest on ill-considered or militarily irrational foundations, and most governments would probably be wary of the adverse effect such an agreement might have on the deterrent power of Western nuclear capabilities. Nevertheless, especially if the USSR should display an apparently genuine interest in such a proposal, popular pressures might become so great as to compel the US and its allies either to accept such an agreement or to risk undermining popular support for the Western stand against the Soviet Bloc.

III. PROBABLE EFFECTS IN THE EVENT OF GREATLY INCREASED THREAT OF GENERAL WAR

17. Soviet nuclear capabilities may eventually present the Free World with a problem unique in history. Peoples and governments have often in the past had to face the threat of heavy devastation, prolonged enemy occupation, massacre of parts of the population, and even destruction of the social order and the political and economic system. But no people or government has ever had to face the imminent likelihood of such enormous destruction of life and property as nuclear weapons can inflict in a brief period of time. Thus, the situation facing allied peoples and governments in the event of imminent threat of general war involving nuclear weapons will be one of a new order, and the pressures will be greater than those produced at any time in history.

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18. Some of the peoples of countries allied to the US at present entertain the hope that if war occurs between the US and the USSR they may not themselves be attacked with nuclear weapons. We do not believe that this hope for immunity from nuclear attack will long survive, at least in Western Europe and Japan, but even if it does not entirely disappear it is unlikely to remain strong. We believe that almost without exception the allies will come to accept the idea that general war would in all probability include the risk of destruction of many of the cities and people of their own countries and would perhaps strike a mortal blow at their civilization.

19. Under these conditions, in a period of grave international crisis governments allied to the US would consider the following possibilities:

a. That the best interests of their countries could be served if the US could be persuaded to yield to Soviet demands or pressures, and that this persuasion could be accomplished by threatening to renounce their treaty commitments and to desert the alliance.

b. That in a prolonged crisis the attractions of neutrality might increase so greatly and popular pressure in their own countries might grow so as to force them to withdraw from the alliance and adopt a neutral position.

c. That, even if neutrality were not feasible, acceptance of Soviet occupation or Communist control would be preferable to undergoing the devastation likely to result from nuclear warfare.

It is also possible that the Kremlin might, at a time of grave international crisis, use the threat of nuclear devastation in an attempt to persuade the governments of at least some countries to forsake their alliance with the US in return for a Soviet pledge to respect their neutrality. The difficulties and risks involved in such an attempt would be considerable.

20. On the other hand, allied governments would also have to consider:

a. That unity and firmness might still offer a reasonable chance of preventing the ultimate outbreak of war without surrendering vital national interests.

b. That it might be difficult or impossible for them to enjoy the rewards of neutrality, since they might be overrun and occupied or brought under effective control by the USSR, even if they sought to remain neutral. Or the US in the course of actions designed to ensure its own survival, to weaken the USSR, and to attain victory might feel compelled to use nuclear weapons against targets in the territory of its former allies.

c. That even though abandonment of the alliance were to prevent war, at least for the time being, the break-up of the alliance and the consequent loss of US support might condemn them eventually to Soviet domination.

21. It is possible that governments would have no real choice between alternatives in a swiftly developing crisis leading to war. It seems probable, however, that most governments would have some chance to control their courses of action, especially if the Kremlin succeeded in managing the crisis in such a way as to give opportunity for some allies to desert the alliance. In such an event the course of action of each allied government would be determined by many factors, of which the following seem to us most important:

a. *The chances of national survival.* Each nation would evaluate its air defenses, its capability of resisting invasion, the likelihood of early and adequate assistance from its allies, the condition of popular morale, and other factors bearing on an estimate of the probable consequences of entering general war.

b. *The political and social stability of the state.* Some countries, such as the UK, have a much higher level of political and social stability than others and a correspondingly greater ability to undergo periods of crisis and war. The governments of these countries can generally count on popular support in time of grave danger. In some of the less stable countries, such as France and Italy, Communists and their allies have great political strength, and would probably be able to confuse if not to control governmental decisions in times of crisis.

c. *The issues at stake.* No country would willingly risk nuclear war unless issues were at stake which it considered vital to its exist-

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ence. The threat of nuclear weapons, however, will almost certainly tend to narrow the range of interests that any country facing war will consider vital.

d. The condition of the alliance at the time of crisis. If the Western alliance had come through a long period of cold war as an integrated and effective coalition, and, above all, if the intermeshing of political, economic, and military relationships had become highly developed, each member government might discover at the moment of crisis that a large part of the crucial decisions had in effect already been made. Under such circumstances any government might find it difficult, though not necessarily impossible, to abandon its commitments, recall its forces, and reverse the whole trend of its foreign policy.

e. The conduct of US policy. The allies would be reluctant to support the US through a grave crisis if they considered that US policy had been rash and provocative. The standards by which the allies would judge US conduct are not easy to define, but it is plain that the existence of the nuclear threat will cause the allies to scrutinize US actions far more critically than they might otherwise have done.

f. The concentration of decision-making. If the crisis should develop with great swiftness, it might make public debate upon policy almost impossible. In such a case, decision-making would tend to be concentrated in fewer hands than normally, and a few dominant powers in the alliance might make de-

isions which for all practical purposes would commit their lesser allies.

22. We believe that in the event of international crisis involving grave danger of general war, the allies of the US would almost certainly support the US as long as they believed that firm maintenance of the alliance would probably avert war.

23. We cannot estimate the probable courses of action of US allies if an international crisis should develop to the point where general war seemed to them virtually certain and no longer to be averted by firm maintenance of the alliance. There is inadequate evidence or precedent on which to calculate the reaction of governments and peoples who consider themselves to be facing imminent threat of attack with nuclear weapons. We believe that the main factors determining their courses of action at such a time would be those discussed above, but we cannot foresee how such factors would operate at some future period when general war may appear to have become almost inevitable.

24. We believe that most allied governments, if confronted with certain national destruction as the sole alternative to an accommodation with the USSR, would choose the latter. We believe it unlikely, though possible, that the major allies of the US would become convinced that the alternatives facing them were so limited and so clear-cut as the two described.

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