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What History Can Teach

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Daedalus: Meeting the Challenges of the New Nuclear Age

Abstract: Most analysis of arms control during the Cold War focuses on its role in maintaining strategic stability between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, history shows that a superpower search for strategic stability is insufficient to explain the roots and course of superpower negotiations. This essay argues that arms control was used as one tool in a broader strategy of war prevention, designed to contain a series of challenges to U.S. and Soviet dominance of the international system that both worried could upset bipolarity and increase the chances of conflict between them. At the same time, U.S. policymakers balanced this joint superpower interest with Washington's extended deterrent commitment to its allies, which ultimately upheld the integrity of the system as a whole. The essay concludes that today's policymakers should integrate arms control into a more comprehensive strategy of political accommodation fit for twenty-first century conditions.

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In the winter of 1985, Thomas Schelling was unhappy. Surveying the state of arms control negotiations in *Foreign Affairs*, Schelling argued that the enterprise had "gone off the tracks" since its heyday in the early 1970s, diverging from his and many other arms control theorists' understanding of its basic aim: to ensure strategic stability between the superpowers. The 1972 Interim Agreement on Strategic Offensive Arms and Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty had fit well with Schelling's vision of arms control: the former froze both sides at approximate parity in intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers, making a disarming first strike extremely difficult, if not impossible; the latter banned nationwide missile defense systems, meaning that neither side could build an effective defense of its homeland, leaving both the United States and the Soviet Union open to a devastating retaliatory second strike if either sought to attack the other. Fitting with much existing arms-control theory and administration rhetoric in support of the SALT I agreements, this strategic stability based on both sides' vulnerability to a massive retaliatory attack became seen as the lodestar of superpower talks, establishing itself as a central point of contention of an increasingly polarized debate between supporters and opponents of arms control over subsequent decades. [1]

Yet since 1972 the effort to limit arms had not lived up to Schelling's early hopes. Arms control had gone off the rails, according to the strategist, because it had neglected the greatest contemporary threat to strategic stability: the race in technology. While Washington and Moscow argued over numbers of weapons, they had failed to tackle

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[1] Thomas C. Schelling, "What Went Wrong with Arms Control?" *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 64, No.2, 219-33; John D. Maurer, "The Purposes of Arms Control," *Texas National Security Review* Vol. 2, No. 1 (http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/870, accessed 8/27/19).

destabilizing developments such as "warheads per target point, readiness, speed of delivery, accuracy or recallability after launch," which had the potential to endanger Schelling's vision by making a disarming first strike theoretically more feasible.[2] As several scholars have recently reminded us, this technological arms race between Washington and Moscow continued throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.[3] If strategic stability was the fundamental aim of talks — as both advocates and critics of the process generally assumed — then this was a strange outcome indeed.

Recent scholarship can help unravel this mystery. Rather than exclusively pursuing strategic stability, research shows that during the 1960s and 1970s U.S. leaders used arms control as one tool in the pursuit of a broader strategy, designed to contain a series of international and domestic challenges they believed could upset the global balance of power and increase the risk of war. The first challenge was a growing crisis over the future of Germany in a divided Europe. The superpower standoffs over the status of Berlin in the late 1950s and early 1960s, culminating in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, impelled policymakers to use arms control as a way to manage the cockpit of the Cold War. The second challenge related to what Lyndon Johnson's National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow termed "the diffusion of power" away from the industrialized North toward the decolonizing Global South.[4] This diffusion included nuclear technology, which had the potential to supercharge states' quest for political independence by giving them the capability to counterbalance the existing nuclear powers with their own

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[2] Schelling, "What Went Wrong with Arms Control?" 227. On the contested development of thinking on stability, see: Benjamin T. Wilson, "Insiders and Outsiders: Nuclear Arms Control Experts in Cold War America" (PhD dissertation, MIT, 2014), 49-107.

[3] Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, "Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 38, Nos.1-2, 38-73; John D. Maurer, "The Forgotten Side of Arms Control: Enhancing U.S. Competitive Advantage, Offsetting Enemy Strengths," *War on the Rocks*, June 27, 2018 (https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/the-forgotten-side-of-arms-control-enhancing-u-s-competitive-advantage-offsetting-enemy-strengths/, accessed 8/27/19); Niccolò Petrelli and Giordana Pulcini, "Nuclear Superiority in the Age of Parity: U.S. Planning, Intelligence Analysis, Weapons Innovation and the Search for a Qualitative Edge, 1969-1976," *The International History Review* Vol. 40, No. 5, 1191-1209.

[4] Jonathan Hunt, "Introduction: 'A Peace That is No Peace,'" *Atomic Reaction: The Spread of Nuclear Weapons and America's New Global Mission, 1945-1970* (draft book manuscript).

arsenals, while increasing the risk that regional conflicts could end in nuclear conflagration. The third challenge was the growing restiveness throughout the Eastern and Western blocs during the late 1960s with the costs of prosecuting the Cold War, a trend that Michael Cotey Morgan has characterized as two "parallel crises of legitimacy" that undermined both superpowers' standing at home and within their respective spheres of influence.[5] As a result of sustained diplomatic engagement, U.S. policymakers gradually realized that Moscow shared many of these anxieties regarding the future of world politics, providing the foundation for cooperation. The 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the 1972 SALT I agreements governing strategic arms were in large part superpower responses designed to contain these three challenges, constituting the foundation of today's arms-control regime. As Hedley Bull noted at the time, these accords limited the chances of nuclear war in a way that served the superpowers' joint interest in maintaining "the existing distribution of power" within the international system.[6]

Yet, in the words of John D. Maurer, "arms control is not always a cooperative enterprise" — indeed it could not be. Successive U.S. administrations pursued these negotiations with a keen eye to how any resulting treaties would affect their allies, balancing U.S.-Soviet joint interests with the need to maintain the integrity of U.S. security guarantees. Reinforcement of the credibility of the U.S. commitment to come to its allies' defense often required military-technical innovations in the U.S. arsenal that ran counter to the strategic stability prescribed by Schelling.[7] By reassuring foreign governments and domestic critics that the United States' commitments still held in an

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[5] Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 253.

[6] Hedley Bull, "Arms Control and World Order," *International Security* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer, 1976), 3-16; Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-6, 213-65.

[7] Maurer, "Purposes of Arms Control"; Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Austin Long, "The Geopolitical Origins of US Hard-Target-Kill Counterforce Capabilities and MIRVs," in Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler, and Shane Mason (eds.) *The Lure and Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age* (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2016), 19-53.

era of negotiation, however, these improvements to the U.S. nuclear arsenal had the effect of limiting allied incentives to pursue their own nuclear forces, stabilizing the nonproliferation elements of the nuclear order and hence the balance of power that the treaties were fundamentally designed to preserve. Thereby the United States managed to retain the credibility of its pledge to use nuclear weapons in defense of its allies, while at the same time reducing the chances that it would have to do so.

This strategy was not foreordained and looks far clearer in hindsight than it did at the time. It required incremental and committed diplomacy, growing slowly out of what Marc Trachtenberg has described as "a web of understandings," not only between the two superpowers but also their allies, and at times other states within the system.[8] If the United States wishes to adapt this regime for a new multipolar order — and given the relative success of the first iteration, it should do so — then it should continue to engage in a patient and sustained dialogue with both old and new rivals, as well as allies and the non-aligned. Through this, the United States will be able to discover the emerging points of crisis, how those interact with the military postures of the states involved, and the extent to which arms control can help mediate the delicate balance between ensuring the joint great-power interest in containing destabilizing threats, while at the same time ensuring that the United States remains faithful to its security commitments. In this way arms control can act as one tool in a broader political process of accommodation that will help us to survive this century.[9]

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[8] Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, University Press, 1999), 390.

[9] Marc Trachtenberg, "The Past and Future of Arms Control," *Daedalus* Vol. 120, No. 1 (Winter 1991), 203-16.

From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, the world's attention was increasingly focused on the developing superpower confrontation over Berlin. Deep within East Germany, yet divided between American, British, French, and Soviet occupying powers, the status of Berlin was an unresolved legacy of the Second World War. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 and 1961 ultimatums demanding that the Western powers withdraw from Berlin were widely interpreted as an attempt to test the will of the United States to defend this outpost of capitalism. However, Marc Trachtenberg has shown how the Berlin crises in fact stemmed from a toxic mix of Soviet anxieties regarding the precarious division of Germany, unratified by treaty, and the possibility that a future nuclear-armed Western Federal Republic (FRG) might press for revision of this tenuous status quo. Moscow's pressure on West Berlin, Trachtenberg argues, was a form of oblique Soviet signaling regarding the danger of a revisionist, nuclear FRG — a signal that their Western interlocutors received and understood. A West German move toward an independent nuclear force, Kennedy's Secretary of State Dean Rusk observed, "might be considered *casus belli* by the Soviets."[10]

With this in mind, the easiest way to resolve the crisis would be to pressure the FRG to foreswear nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees. Whether Bonn was genuinely interested in pursuing the nuclear option is still hotly contested by scholars, but the FRG was not willing to unilaterally foreswear nuclear weapons, a course that West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer worried would be the first step toward superpower-enforced neutrality. By mid-1961, Kennedy was increasingly considering an agreement with the Soviets that would trade Soviet guarantees of Western rights in Berlin for Bonn's renunciation of any nuclear ambitions. However, the administration

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[10] Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 251-6, 305.

remained unwilling to confront the FRG directly on the nuclear issue given the fundamental West German security interests involved.[11]

Only in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis was Kennedy able to face this issue. The key was the change in Soviet attitude. Khrushchev's failure in Cuba had persuaded him that a policy of confrontation had simply exhausted itself. Instead, the two powers attempted to come to an agreement that would place a lid on the German nuclear question without isolating Bonn in a way that would lead it to act unpredictably. The Limited Test Ban Treaty of August 1963, prohibiting atmospheric nuclear testing and thus making any non-nuclear signatory's efforts to develop a deterrent far more difficult, was the answer. While not mentioning Berlin explicitly, exchanges between Kennedy administration officials and the Soviets over the LTBT established linkage: West Germany would have less incentive to nuclearize if West Berlin were left untouched; similarly, Bonn would be wise to remain non-nuclear if it wished to protect Berlin. Thus, the Test Ban, according to Trachtenberg, "had come to represent a whole web of understandings that lay just below the surface."[12]

Bonn consented to this arrangement for a number of reasons. For Trachtenberg, a combination of the FRG's dependence on the U.S. and changes in West German domestic politics eventually forced Adenauer to accept the LTBT. Meanwhile, the United States deepened its public commitment to the FRG's security by agreeing, in Trachtenberg's words, "to maintain a sizeable force in Germany on a more or less permanent basis." This commitment embedded West Germany's foreswearing of nuclear weapons even more profoundly: any steps toward an independent deterrent

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[11] Gene Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions," *International Security* Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), 91-129; Andreas Lutsch, "The Persistent Legacy: Germany's Place in the Nuclear Order," Nuclear Proliferation International History Project Working Paper No.5 (May 2015); Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 280-2, 327-42.
[12] Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 380-91.

would place this American pledge in jeopardy. Thus, the U.S. guarantee served both superpowers' aim of keeping West Germany non-nuclear, while ensuring Washington's interest that the FRG remain firmly embedded within NATO. [13]

However, it is clear that a continued U.S. commitment a nuclear edge over the Soviet Union was also a key part of the American package. The recipient of briefings on U.S. war plans, Kennedy increasingly recognized the declining utility of American nuclear superiority, such that at the time of the Test Ban's signature he realized that a first strike on the Soviet Union could not meaningfully limit the damage the Soviet Union could inflict on the United States in retaliation.[14] Yet despite this, nuclear superiority remained a key element of the American rhetorical armory regarding the FRG, as well as at home. "The US had succeeded in having its way on Cuba, because it had superior conventional and nuclear forces," Kennedy told Adenauer in November 1962. It was therefore necessary, the president argued, "to strengthen both Western conventional and nuclear forces, both in general and particularly in regard to Berlin."[15] These arguments became even more important as the Kennedy administration pushed the case for the LTBT. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara argued to the Senate that, far from weakening American nuclear superiority, the Test Ban could in fact increase it because Washington was more proficient in the underground testing permitted under the treaty. McNamara privately reassured Adenauer that the Test Ban had had only been possible "because of the increase military power of the West" and that both the United States and the FRG should "continue to expand their forces" under its aegis.[16]

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[13] Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 394-402.

[14] Fred Kaplan, "JFK's First Strike Plan," *The Atlantic* October 2001 (https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2001/10/jfks-first-strike-plan/376432/, accessed 8/27/19); Scott D. Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security* Vol. 12, No.1 (Summer 1987), 22-51; Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 295-7, 317-8.

[15] "Memorandum of Large-Group Meeting of FRG Chancellor Adenauer and U.S. President Kennedy, Washington," November 14, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115399, accessed 8/27/19).

[16] U.S. Embassy to Department of State, "Secretary McNamara's Conversation with Chancellor Adenauer," August 2, 1963 in William Burr and Hector L. Montford (eds.), *The Making of the Limited Test*

This commitment to some form of nuclear edge over the Soviets, even as Moscow drew to effective parity in strategic launchers, would have long-term consequences for Washington as it sought to push forward with arms control. The agreements themselves would help manage central issues of dispute, stabilize superpower relations, and thereby reduce the chances of war. However, successive administrations would continue to expand and then modernize their nuclear forces. Domestically, further advances in the U.S. nuclear posture convinced some skeptical hawks that the United States would still be able to defend its interests under the treaties; internationally, it was designed to reassure nervous allies that Washington still had the capability and will to come to their defense. This necessity of the broader political settlement introduced just the kind of technology-driven instabilities feared by Schelling.[17]

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The case of West Germany highlighted another issue: the spread of nuclear technology beyond the reach of the superpowers. While the FRG had been contained somewhat by the LTBT, nuclear proliferation remained a cause of increasing superpower anxiety. McNamara estimated that, in addition to West Germany, as many as seven countries could go nuclear in the near term: the People's Republic of China, India, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Sweden, and Israel.[18] The prospect of further nuclear proliferation held the potential to supercharge the other major geopolitical development

Ban Treaty, 1958-1963 (https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB94/, accessed 8/27/19); James Cameron, *The Double Game: The Demise of America's First Missile Defense System and the Rise of Strategic Arms Limitation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 43-4.

[17] Francis J. Gavin, "Strategies of Inhibition: U.S. Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nuclear Nonproliferation," *International Security* Vol. 40, No. 1 (Summer 2015), 33; Long and Green, "Stalking the Secure Second Strike," 38-73; Maurer, "The Forgotten Side of Arms Control"; Maurer, "Purposes of Arms Control"; Petrelli and Pulcini, "Nuclear Superiority in an Age of Parity," 1191-1209.

[18] Moeed Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation: The History of the Future of Nuclear Weapons," *Foreign Policy at Brookings Policy Paper* No. 11 (January 2009), 15.

of the postwar years besides the Cold War: the quest of former colonies for greater political independence. As Francis J. Gavin has argued, U.S. policymakers had been opponents of proliferation since the dawn of the nuclear age because of its "power-equalizing effects," which could help states resist pressure from Washington, as well as increasing the risk of a premeditated or accidental nuclear conflagration.[19] A proliferated world would present American power with dangerous choices. U.S. intervention in a regional nuclear confrontation involving a Soviet ally could lead to a chain reaction ending in a U.S.-Soviet war. Yet American refusal to involve itself in a regional nuclear crisis, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency John Foster worried, could lead to "a renunciation of [U.S.] commitments and involvement all over the world."[20]

The Chinese nuclear test of October 1964 forced policymakers to come to grips with this reality. Kennedy's National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy had described a Chinese bomb as "the greatest single threat to the status quo over the next few years." Yet Washington struggled to deter Beijing from pursuing nuclear weapons and rejected the possibility of a preventive strike.[21] The PRC's test proved that a country that the CIA considered "near the margin of bare subsistence" could produce the ultimate weapon, setting a precedent for others.[22] A committee chaired by former deputy secretary of defense Roswell Gilpatric feared that without a change in course, Washington's influence would wane in Asia and the Middle East as regional powers such as India and the United Arab Republic went nuclear, ultimately weakening U.S. sway over Europe. If states in the Global South developed nuclear weapons, the committee concluded, it would be "unrealistic to hope that Germany and other European countries" would not do the same, despite the implicit bargain of the LTBT. The spread of nuclear weapons

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[19] Gavin, "Strategies of Inhibition," 9-46.
[20] Jonathan Hunt, "The Birth of an International Community: Negotiating the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons," in Robert Hutchings and Jeremi Suri (eds.), *Foreign Policy Breakthroughs: Cases in Successful Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 80.
[21] Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 78; Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 383-6.
[22] Cameron, *Double Game*, 68.

thus not only represented a major threat to international security, but also a menace to the United States' global military reach.[23] Moscow shared these anxieties. "As the world's other superpower," Hal Brands argues, "the Soviet Union would find its influence diminished and security challenged by proliferation no less than would the United States." This indeed seemed to be the case as the Kremlin began to indicate through both public and private channels that it was also concerned with the spread of nuclear weapons.[24]

This joint superpower interest in nonproliferation had to be reconciled with U.S. security commitments. President Lyndon B. Johnson was cautious about abandoning plans for a multilateral force (MLF) — a fleet of missile-armed ships with multinational crews, controlled by a council of participating states — which was designed to balance West Germany's demand for a role in NATO's nuclear operations with the U.S. desire to maintain a veto over use. Only further evidence that India was moving toward development of a nuclear weapon in the wake of continued Chinese testing finally convinced both superpowers to compromise in the second half of 1966. The Kremlin consented to the U.S. pursuit of a "software solution" for NATO involving permanent West German membership of a consultative mechanism on Alliance nuclear issues, the Nuclear Planning Group, and permitted the MLF to die quietly rather than be killed publicly as a precondition of a nonproliferation agreement. At the same time, the U.S. prosecuted a policy that Daniel Khalessi has described as "strategic ambiguity" with regard to existing NATO nuclear sharing — under which allied personnel were trained to deliver U.S. manufactured and controlled nuclear weapons in wartime — loosening the language of Articles I and II of the treaty in a way that did not prohibit this arrangement. In late 1966, the Soviet Union stopped pushing the United States for more

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[23] Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 82; "Report by the Committee on Nuclear Proliferation," January 21, 1965, in Evans Gerakas, David S. Patterson, and Carolyn B. Yee (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arms Control and Disarmament* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1997) (https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v11/d64, accessed 8/27/19).
[24] Hal Brands, "Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War: The Superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT," *Cold War History* Vol.7, No 3, 402-3.

specific language that would explicitly ban NATO nuclear sharing. As such, both sides compromised in order to manage their joint fear of a proliferated world. With these obstacles removed, the path to the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty became easier.[25]

Considerable challenges remained, not least persuading most of the world's states to sign a treaty to foreswear nuclear weapons. A key element of this campaign was supposedly the so-called "bargain," whereby states would give up nuclear arms in exchange for peaceful nuclear technology and a commitment to disarmament by the nuclear powers. Yet research by Dane Swango shows that linkage between adherence to the treaty and peaceful nuclear cooperation was not as strong as commonly assumed: the NPT allowed states to continue to work on civil nuclear projects with non-signatories, while Washington remained wary of extending more help to NPT parties or cutting assistance to holdouts.[26] Similarly, as Matthew Harries has noted, the commitment to disarmament was highly qualified. Crucially, the final treaty did not mandate specific arms-reduction steps. Instead Article VI of the NPT committed all dates to merely pursue — rather than conclude — "effective measures relating to" disarmament. Such language, according to Harries, reflected "the core reality" that, "for a decisive number of [non-nuclear] states, those aspirations [to disarmament] were not worth sacrificing the mutual security benefit that an NPT would provide." Instead, according to Harries, the language was designed to save face: "to offset the psychological effect of accepting 'second-class' status" by being able to show that the treaty represented "a positive policy of peace, rather than a passive acceptance of inferiority." At the same time, through provisions for a review conference and language contextualizing it within a broader disarmament push, the NPT established a political

[25] Brands, "Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War," 404-8; Daniel Khalessi, "Strategic Ambiguity: Nuclear Sharing and the Secret Strategy for Drafting Articles I and II of the Nonproliferation Treaty," *The Nonproliferation Review* Vol. 22, Nos. 3-4, 421-39; Mohamed I. Shaker, *The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: Origin and Implementation, 1959-1979* Vol. 1 (London: Oceana Publications, 1980), 129-89, 214-49.
[26] Dane Swango, "The United States and the Role of Nuclear Co-operation and Assistance in the Design of the Non-Proliferation Treaty," *The International History Review* Vol. 36, No. 2, 210-29.

process that "would allow non-nuclear-weapon states to continue to make the case for [a disarmed] world." It was this compromise that allowed the central element of the nonproliferation regime to come into being.[27]

Containing the diffusion of power was not entirely successful, nor was it cost-free. The NPT entered into force in March 1970, but several important regional powers refused to sign, most notably India — on which much superpower attention had centered — but also Pakistan, Brazil, Israel, and South Africa. Of the five recognized nuclear states, two — France and China — did not endorse it. The FRG did not ratify it until 1975. This was indicative of a broader distrust. Despite their acquiescence, many West and East European governments remained wary of the way the two superpowers had cooperated to preserve their dominance of global politics at the expense of their allies' military options. While states varied in their responses to the NPT, both signatories and non-signatories worried that it presaged a new superpower condominium and looked for ways to maintain their room for political maneuver.[28]

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The increasing restiveness of the superpowers' close allies formed one half of what Michael Cotey Morgan has termed the "parallel crises of legitimacy" that afflicted both East and West in the later 1960s. Both the United States and Soviet Union had to deal with newly independent foreign policies from allies that had previously been relatively quiescent. While France had initiated an independent course earlier in the decade, from 1966 as West German foreign minister and 1969 as chancellor, Willy Brandt pursued a strategy designed to secure "peace in the fullest sense of the word" through human

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[27] Matthew Harries, "The Role of Article VI in Debates About the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty" (PhD King's College London, 2013), 90, 97-141; Shaker, *The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* Vol.2, 555-648.
[28] Brands, "Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War," 409-10.

contacts across the Iron Curtain, a posture that U.S. policymakers feared presaged a greater shift to independence than was in fact the case. This process was paralleled in Eastern Europe within stricter limits. In August 1968, Moscow moved decisively to crush Czechoslovakia's bid for greater independence during the Prague Spring, but East Germany, Poland, and Romania all became more assertive in pressing their economic and political autonomy within the Eastern Bloc.[29]

As the 1960s progressed, the perception that Washington and Moscow had reached some approximate balance of terror diminished fears of a superpower clash, opening space for new policies on the part of West European states and raising questions about how to move beyond the existing stalemate. This new situation exacerbated military questions for Washington. During the early 1960s, the U.S. had relied on its significant nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union to project an image of confidence in the crises over Cuba and Berlin, lending credibility to U.S. pledges to come to the defense of NATO. However, by the end of the decade the Soviet Union was engaged in a huge strategic nuclear buildup, expanding its arsenal of ICBMs rapidly in an effort to reach nuclear parity.[30] By 1967, U.S. diplomats worried that the Soviet buildup would "lead many in Europe to fresh questioning of whether the U.S. would go to war on Europe's behalf," with the erosion of Washington's "ability to limit damage" to itself in a nuclear war further accelerating "the erosion of the trans-Atlantic relationship which is already in train." American policymakers thought this could ultimately lead West European states to safeguard their security through independent accommodation with Moscow, as they worried Brandt was doing, or by developing an independent nuclear capability in the French manner. [31]

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[29] Morgan, *Final Act*, 27-32, 67-72.
[30] Cameron, *Double Game*, 110.
[31] Morgan, *Final Act*, 21-7, 67-74; State Department, "A Study of US-Soviet Military Relationships 1957-1976: Foreign Policy Implications," December 18, 1967, Tab B and C, *U.S. Nuclear History: Nuclear Arms and Policy in the Missile Age, 1955-1968,* Digital National Security Archive.

The new president shared these anxieties regarding the credibility of America's security commitments. Richard Nixon agreed that under conditions of strategic nuclear parity, the U.S. policy of "flexible response" to defend Western Europe, carried over from the Kennedy-Johnson era, was "baloney." Johnson had left Nixon with the option of talks with the Soviet Union on the limitation of strategic armaments. Moscow had rejected Johnson's overtures for substantive discussions until late in his term, but now it became increasingly interested in negotiations in order, according to Vladislav Zubok, "to convert the growing power of the Soviet Union into the coin of international diplomacy and prestige." However, Nixon wanted to ensure that the United States had as many programs as possible underway to bargain with. The Soviets had "closed the gap" in strategic arms, Nixon wrote to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, "they continue to increase" and "they want to talk…. We must see that the gap is not widened on the other side." Nixon wanted to ensure that Congress authorized funds for an anti-Soviet missile defense system so that the United States had sufficient leverage to secure a halt to the Soviet offensive buildup. Strategic arms talks could thereby prevent the nuclear balance from tipping further against Washington, undermining its commitment to Western Europe, and deepening the crisis of U.S. legitimacy within the transatlantic community.[32]

Yet it was the domestic crisis of legitimacy that had the most direct impact on Nixon's approach to arms control. Upheaval within the United States stemming from U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia had already brought down one president and during the 1968 presidential election Nixon had pledged to bring "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam." Initially Nixon and Kissinger planned to use the possibility of nuclear talks to entice Moscow into pressuring North Vietnam into coming to terms. As Nixon's first year progressed, however, it became increasingly clear that this anti-Vietnam backlash

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[32] Cameron, *Double Game*, 79-106, 110-1; James Cameron, "Moscow, 1972" in Kristina Spohr and David Reynolds (eds.), *Transcending the Cold War: Summits, Statecraft, and the Dissolution of Bipolarity in Europe, 1970-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 70-2; Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 112; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union and the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 207.

was growing into a revolt against the militarized containment of communism. One of the early targets of this backlash was Nixon's ABM program, which became the focus of intense debate in the Senate. Criticized for its expense and technical infeasibility, funding for the system passed the upper chamber in August 1969 by a margin of one. Designed to fortify Nixon's hand at the upcoming strategic arms limitation talks (SALT), ABM became emblematic of how difficult it would be to launch new nuclear programs to offset future Soviet forces if Moscow did not sign a strategic arms agreement.[33]

In these unpropitious circumstances SALT stalled, with the Soviets advocating for a treaty limiting technologically advanced U.S. ABM systems, but pressing for concessions on offensive forces that were unacceptable to Washington. By late 1970, Nixon's strategy was in danger of failure. It was far easier to identify the Vietnam War as the root of Washington's travails than to find a way out of it, short of capitulation. Pressure on Hanoi and Moscow, including conventional bombing, operations in Cambodia, and a secret alert of U.S. nuclear forces, had produced little.[34] Nor was there much to report on the administration's attempts to reach out to the People's Republic of China, with progress frozen until the spring of 1971. Needing a breakthrough on at least one issue, the White House accelerated talks on strategic arms as a way to show that Nixon's strategy of peace was delivering tangible results. The framework agreement of May 20, 1971 was the outcome: Washington and Moscow would sign a treaty on ABM systems — the area of greatest Soviet concern — combined with "certain measures" regarding strategic offensive arms. This resulted in a permanent ABM Treaty, limiting both sides to two ground-based defensive missile sites each, and a five-year Interim Agreement on Strategic Offensive Arms that froze U.S. and Soviet land-based ICBM

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[33] William Burr and Jeffrey Kimball, "Nixon's Secret Nuclear Alert: Vietnam War Diplomacy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff Readiness Test," *Cold War History* Vol. 3, No.2 (January 2003), 116; Cameron, *Double Game*, 107-24.

[34] Burr and Kimball, "Nixon's Secret Nuclear Alert," 113-56; Scott D. Sagan and Jeremi Suri, "The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling, and Safety in October 1969," *International Security* Vol. 27, No.4 (Spring 2003), 150-83.

launchers at 1,056 and 1,618, with SLBM launchers capped at 656 and 740 respectively, or 710 and 950, all on modern submarines, if older SLBM and ICBM launchers were dismantled.[35]

Nixon signed the SALT I agreements with great fanfare at the Moscow Summit of May 1972, yet was criticized by former supporters, such as Senator from Washington State Henry M. Jackson, who believed he had given away too much. Nixon privately shared many of his critics' doubts, but given congressional opposition to new programs in the face of the Soviet buildup it was the best deal available. The president lamented the American public's loss of will, which he saw as endangering Washington's extended deterrent guarantee. "The real question is whether the Americans give a damn anymore," Nixon reflected a few weeks before he signed SALT I, "…. No president could risk New York to save Tel Aviv or Bonn." Despite his upcoming meeting with Brezhnev at which he would conclude the first U.S.-Soviet strategic arms agreements, Nixon believed that ultimately it was only U.S. "strength" that prevented "the world" from "becoming entirely communist."[36]

While he found the post-Vietnam backlash against militarized containment distressing, Nixon understood that the "peace issue," as he called it, was an unavoidable feature of the domestic political landscape. Gearing up for his reelection campaign, on his return from Moscow Nixon argued that the agreements strengthened peace for both sides by

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[35] Cameron, *Double Game*, 136-60; "Interim Agreement Between the United States and the Soviet Union," May 26, 1972 in Erin R. Mahan (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXXII, SALT I* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2010) (https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d317, accessed 8/27/19); "Protocol to the Interim Agreement Between the United States and the Soviet Union," May 26, 1972, *FRUS, 1969-76, Vol. XXXII* (https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d318, accessed 8/27/19).
[36] Cameron, *Double Game*, 158-9; Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1979), 821; "Memorandum for the President's Files," May 8, 1972, in David C. Geyer, Nina D. Howland, and Kent Sieg (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2006) (https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d204, accessed 8/27/19).

limiting the arms race, adapting Schelling's arguments for a broader audience. To a joint session of Congress, Nixon claimed that the accords "enhanced the security of both nations" by limiting an arms race that was both "wasteful and dangerous." Adopting the rhetoric of the arms controllers, Nixon argued that the agreements "reduce[d] the level of fear by reducing the causes of fear, for our two peoples and for all peoples in the world."[37] The situation in Central Europe reinforced the sense that the world was indeed entering a new era. Instead of using nuclear parity to reopen the question of Berlin, Moscow opted for diplomacy, signing the Four Power Agreement regulating the situation in Berlin and the Treaty of Moscow on Germany's postwar borders. Just as U.S. quantitative superiority in strategic launchers receded into the past, so seemingly did one of its primary justifications: to maintain the status quo in Central Europe through the credible threat of force.[38]

Yet at the same time as the president publicly advocated for arms control based on stability, the Nixon administration continued to press ahead in areas unconstrained by SALT I. The U.S. had conceded a Soviet margin in numbers of strategic offensive missile launchers, but the administration argued that Washington would still retain a lead in warheads — of around 3,200 multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) after the Interim Agreement expired in 1977. The U.S. also pressed ahead with developmental studies for a next-generation MX ICBM, the new Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile, and the B-1 bomber. In part this was to build support for the agreements among Nixon's traditional conservative base, but also to secure the approval of the Department of Defense. Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird was adamant that such improvements were essential for the United States to maintain the credibility of its security commitments. As John D. Maurer has recently argued, through this combination of arms control and new programs the Nixon administration was able

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[37] Cameron, *Double Game*, 137, 160; Richard Nixon, "Address to a Joint Session of the Congress on Return From Austria, the Soviet Union, Iran, and Poland," June 1, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project (https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/254910, accessed 8/27/19).

[38] Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 72-3.

to defuse much of the post-Vietnam animus against strategic arms and cap Soviet offensive forces, while channeling the superpower arms race into an area of traditional American strength: technology.[39]

Given the reality of mutual vulnerability, the military significance of this technological edge was highly contestable, yet successive U.S. administrations believed it was important. According to Austin Long and Brendan Green, some American policymakers entertained the idea of using these new capabilities to limit damage in a nuclear war. They also saw them as symbolically significant, calculating, in the words of Long and Green, "that the nuclear balance would shape the political choices of other states — the Soviet Union, NATO allies, and third parties — even in an era of nuclear plenty." Even if superpower politics had moved beyond the crises of the early 1960s, the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations held on to the belief that they needed to push forward with technological innovation in order to maintain the integrity of the U.S. security guarantee to NATO. U.S. leaders recognized that this technological advantage may have been more valuable as a symbol of American power than for its military utility, but in a balance characterized by arsenals of almost unimaginable destructiveness perception was perhaps more important in maintaining allied confidence than the reality. As Nixon put it to the NSC, "to our allies and the public, appearances matter." Kissinger was blunter still, "We told [the allies] we were qualitatively superior. We can't now say that that doesn't make any difference."[40]

The Nixon administration and its successors therefore struck a delicate but enduring balance between the imperatives of arms control and the requirements of extended deterrence. As such, successive administrations have been criticized for both going too

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[39] Cameron, *Double Game*, 158-9; Maurer, "The Forgotten Side of Arms Control"; Maurer, "Purposes of Arms Control"; Petrelli and Pulcini, "Nuclear Superiority in an Age of Parity," 1200.
[40] Green and Long, "The Geopolitical Origins of US Hard-Target-Kill Counterforce Capabilities and MIRVs," 20-4, 33-4, 41-7.

far in institutionalizing a militarily unwise and immoral posture of "mutual assured destruction" (or "MAD") through arms talks and at the same time doing too little to stop the self-defeating action-reaction cycle that left both Moscow and Washington running an interminable and destabilizing technological race, as if they were "apes on a treadmill."[41] Yet moving toward an exclusive reliance on either arms control or arms racing was fraught with dangers. The feared political consequences of conceding the technological race to the Soviets were large. Without a credible story to tell about the validity of extended deterrence to domestic and international audiences, the U.S. commitment to NATO could be called into question, reopening arguments regarding the need for an autonomous European deterrent, endangering the global non-proliferation regime, and undermining the entire arms-control edifice that had been built since the early 1960s. This danger was brought home with the Soviet deployment of the SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missile in the 1970s. "Periodic reassurances" to West Germany, the State Department argued, "have always been necessary" because "the Germans may never be wholly satisfied with American nuclear guarantees." However, deployment also needed to be combined with arms control, to minimize political controversy and maintain "stable East-West relations."[42] NATO responded with the 1979 dual-track decision, balancing missile deployments with the offer of talks.

Moving to greater reliance on arms racing at the expense of arms control held its own disruptive potential. When the Reagan administration appeared to be doing so in its early years, the resulting anti-nuclear protests in both the United States and Western Europe played a role in the White House's shift to greater engagement with the Soviet leadership while maintaining its modernization efforts.[43] This tradition of balance

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[41] Donald G. Brennan, "Strategic Alternatives I," *New York Times*, May 24, 1971, 31; Paul C. Warnke, "Apes on a Treadmill," *Foreign Policy* No. 18 (Spring 1975), 12-29.

[42] Richard A. Ericson Jr. and George H. Vest to Cyrus Vance, "SCC Meeting on PRM-38, August 23," August 16, 1978, William Burr (ed.), *Thirtieth Anniversary of NATO's Dual-Track Decision: The Road to the Euromissiles Crisis and the End of the Cold War*, National Security Archive (https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb301, accessed 8/27/19).

[43] William M. Knoblauch, *Nuclear Freeze in a Cold War: The Reagan Administration, Cultural Activism, and the End of the Arms Race* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017).

endures in the Obama White House's approach to New START, at once cutting U.S. and Russian strategic forces to their lowest level in decades while at the same time laying out a comprehensive plan for the technological overhaul of the U.S. arsenal. Thus the "character" of U.S. weapons development, criticized by Schelling as endangering strategic stability, played and continues to play an important role in holding together the broader security order that American arms control efforts are ultimately designed to preserve.

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By the early 1970s, the foundations of today's arms control regime had emerged. Over the preceding decade, Washington had crafted a network of treaties that helped to contain the disruptive potential of the German question and the spread of nuclear arms. The U.S. had also struck strategic limitation agreements with its superpower rival that saw off the domestic backlash against militarized containment in the United States while capping the Soviet offensive buildup. At the same time, these agreements preserved American freedom to develop increasingly effective nuclear weapons, helping to reassure its allies that it would still come to their defense, thereby stemming demand for independent deterrents and strengthening barriers against proliferation. As such, arms control has proven an extremely useful tool in managing the manifold dilemmas that nuclear weapons pose to the United States' relations with adversaries, allies, and non-aligned states, as well as its domestic politics. Given this, it would be wise for Washington to seek the preservation of this network of treaties for as long as possible. Any steps to modify it should be taken in a way that does not jeopardize these enduring benefits.

The extent to which the current regime can be extended to stabilize the new multipolar era of great power relations is an open question. China defines its strength far more by its economic reach and conventional military than its nuclear arsenal, presenting a fundamental challenge to those who argue it should join strategic arms control talks as befits its growing status. It also reminds us of Hedley Bull's dictum that "arms control is concerned chiefly with only one dimension of world order, *viz.* peace and security" and it would be foolhardy to "saddle it with responsibility for every dimension."[44] If arms control does not adapt to take account of China's growing military strength, however, it will lose its former level of effectiveness as a tool for managing the security dimension of great-power relations. Given the success that U.S. policymakers have enjoyed in using arms control as a tool to uphold both American influence and global security, it is imperative that they try.

As well as underscoring the value of arms control and the risk of tearing up established pacts in search of the perfect agreement, history should teach policymakers to look beyond formulae for strategic stability to other ways in which arms control can help to contain disruptive challenges to the balance of power and minimize the chances of war. Identification of these challenges, the joint interest in managing them, and the military-technical and diplomatic measures that can be taken to do so, can only be achieved through the maintenance of sustained dialogue on the full range of issues confronting the major powers. This great-power exercise in threat management should be balanced with engagement with allies to find the compromises necessary to ensure the continued credibility of U.S. security guarantees and thereby broaden the domestic political coalition in favor of agreement.[45] This will be a piecemeal process, progressing in fits and starts, often in response to immediate crises, in a manner that will appear clearer in retrospect than it did at the time. The results will inevitably be imperfect, failing to satisfy fully any domestic political tribe or state within the system, but history teaches

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[44] Bull, "Arms Control and World Order," 13.
[45] Maurer, "Purposes of Arms Control."

us that the sustained and patient elaboration and maintenance of such a web of understandings is our best hope to avoid catastrophe.