

Crusading Against Nuclear Proliferation

The Cold War has ended, democracy is busting out all over, and the peoples of the world will live happily ever after. Right? Not necessarily. Now, "we have to find a way to live with nuclear balkanization," according to Gary Milhollin, director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control. Milhollin, a Washington, DC-based researcher, has been called a nuisance and a crusader, and was suggested for a Nobel Peace Prize. He thinks that nuclear war may be more likely than ever, now that several developing and volatile nations possess nuclear weapons or are able to obtain them.

"One of the important factors in the total risk is how many fingers are on the trigger," says Milhollin. No matter how many bombs they've got, each superpower has only one finger on the trigger. "That world is safer than a world in which there are fewer bombs overall, but a lot more fingers on the trigger."

Despite the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), signed in 1968, nuclear proliferation continues. Certain loopholes make it easy to divert materials intended for peaceful projects, such as nuclear power, to other nations and other uses, says Milhollin. So he has mounted a crusade to halt the spread of nuclear weapons into the third world. As a University of Wisconsin law professor and former Nuclear Regulatory Commission judge with a degree in engineering, Milhollin is uniquely suited for the task.

Milhollin's method: track the transactions of materials that could be used to make nuclear weapons—such as heavy water (deuterium oxide, which creates the chemical chain reaction that ignites a nuclear explosion), bomb triggers, and rocket motors—expose the perpetrators, and call for action by their

governments. His motive: to force governments to change. "A private operator can be more influential than the State Department," he avers, because the U.S. government won't publicly embarrass foreign nations with whom it has diplomatic relations.

While diplomats are pursuing aid packages and other "constructive engagement," Milhollin explains, a mini-arms race is simultaneously and surreptitiously mounting. He calls proliferation "a pattern of fear." Countries such as China, Israel, Libya, Pakistan, and African nations "don't get the bomb for conquest," he said in a documentary that recently aired on Wisconsin television.

"They get it because they fear somebody else is going to get it first."

In the current climate of what Milhollin calls "regional insecurity," pre-existing tension and instability could trigger a nuclear confrontation. For example, developing nations, particularly those in South Asia, might use the bomb against each other. "If India and Pakistan started feuding over Kashmir," says Milhollin, "they're going to have to decide within 24 hours whether to use the bomb or lose it."

Worse, as in the case of the Middle East, where the United States and the Soviet Union may be allied to rival states, a nuclear threat may suck in the superpowers. More chilling still, "extremist" countries may seek revenge against the United States. "There would be no guarantee they wouldn't bomb New York or Washington as a deterrent to another bombing such as the U.S. strike against Libya."

In a July 29, 1990, article in the *New York Times*, published just days before Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and began his siege in the Persian Gulf, Milhollin warned of Iraq's

belligerence and its plans to build atomic bombs. The U.S. Commerce and State Departments are supporting IBM in its negotiations to sell a supercomputer to Brazilian scientists who are developing nuclear weapons technology for Iraq and Brazil. Iraq's nuclear capabilities were made public earlier this year after the sale of nuclear bomb triggers to Iraq from a Massachusetts firm was stopped as the shipment went through England.

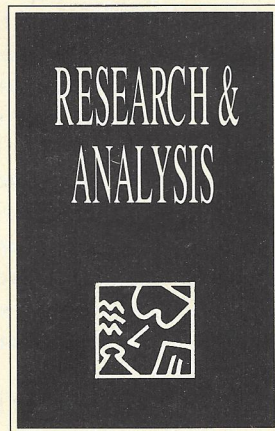
Tracking Nuclear Business

Global dynamics aside, Milhollin views proliferation primarily as an import-export problem, and it's from this vantage that he attacks it. Once technology is in the marketplace, "there's no way to put a circle around it," he points out. "If you teach someone how to run a reactor for electricity, he knows how to run it to make bombs." And there has been no penalty when someone breaches the nonproliferation treaty.

As long as the demand for weapons materials exists, there will be people who will trade in them, says Milhollin. And in this import-export business, private companies as well as individual entrepreneurs are often the intermediaries. From the point of view of these brokers, trade in heavy water spells megatons of money.

Some sales are transacted without a license, while some are licensed improperly. This makes sales difficult enough to monitor, and the effects of such deals are often not felt until three to five years later. Black market trade is also easy. "All you need is a phone, a fax, and no sense of morality," Milhollin says. And it is to the Western nations' advantage not to halt their legitimate sale of high-tech equipment, since it's seen as good for the economy. In fact, Western nations—particularly West Germany—are proliferator nations' main suppliers.

So the Wisconsin Project's day-to-day operations involve stalking the details and piecing together the proliferation puzzle. That means combing public records and government documents. Pursuing leads involves a con-



By *Miranda Spencer*

stant stream of transoceanic phone calls and visits with agencies, public officials, and foreign embassies. The information is not even classified, and often comes from industry sources. "It's their job to know who's selling what to whom because it's a competitive business," he observes.

Milhollin's most productive network has been the press, with whom he shares a cooperative relationship. "They use me as a sort of clearinghouse," he says. "They have their own sources," he explains. "I will know 75 to 80 percent of a story, but I can't do much with it because I don't have the time to find out the other 20 to 25 percent. If I get stymied, they can take it the rest of the way." His contacts include Michael Gordon of the *New York Times*, Scott Armstrong, formerly of the *Washington Post*, and other top correspondents. These people are on the inside and can broach a pressing topic with their editors.

Once he completes a damning dossier, he routes it to the press, seeking coverage by either contacting reporters

directly, or writing articles and op-eds himself: "If I have something hot, I just call and say, 'I have something you might be interested in knowing about.'" Periodicals in which Milhollin's work has appeared, or in which he is quoted as an expert, include *Foreign Policy*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Defense*, and *Foreign Affairs Weekly*, and international papers—publications read by influential people.

His articles have appeared in the nation's "papers of record," bearing eye-catching titles such as "Asia's Nuclear Nightmare/The German Con-

nection" and "Why Are We Helping The Third World Go Nuclear?" He credits his publishing success to timing—"being aware of what people want to read about"—and credibility. "You have the quality of what you've written and your reputation."

Creating bad press for proliferators is the linchpin of Milhollin's efforts. "Governments are sensitive to media pressure. They just hate it. So do companies," Milhollin says. He gives the example of his latest project, halting the sale of U.S. supercomputers to Israel and Brazil. "The main reason they are being seriously considered for export is because nobody knows about the issue. If they became publicly known and publicly debated, the government would not have the courage to approve them." As of June, Milhollin predicted that he has prevented or at least stalled the U.S. sale of supercomputers to Israel, but fears that sales to Brazil will go through.

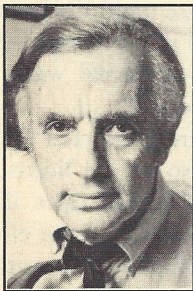
Nuclear Laundering Redressed

Due to this kind of media pressure, countries are now addressing—and

Milhollin views proliferation primarily as an import-export problem.

"Arresting, compelling, and very important."

—Kai Erikson

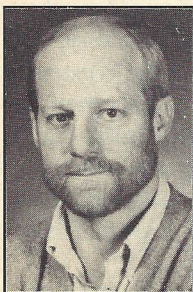


The atomic age has witnessed the growth of a genocidal system—a constellation of men, weapons, and strategies which, if implemented, could end life on this planet. The cast of mind that created and sustains this threat is the subject of this "genuinely thought-provoking book."—RAUL HILBERG

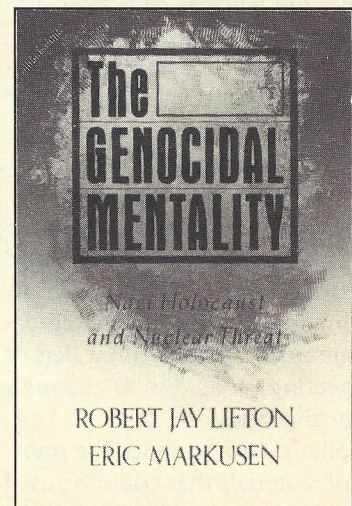
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redressing—wayward technology and other breaches of treaty and sanity, sometimes for the first time. Perhaps the most dramatic case (the subject of a recent *60 Minutes* segment), involved the corralling of the late Nazi arms broker Alfred Hempel.

Hempel, a German army officer during World War II, has been a principal supplier of nuclear materials to third world “wanna-bes,” according to the CIA. He has supplied Argentina, India, Israel, and South Africa with low-enriched uranium and heavy water.

Enter Milhollin, who was able to uncover a “nuclear laundering” scheme. Hempel exploited a close relationship with the Soviet Union and China that allowed him to arrange trade in nuclear materials under the guise of legitimate business, and then route the materials through Switzerland and other neutral nations. Hempel’s operations alone allowed India to build about fifteen nuclear weapons a year and tripled South Africa’s nuclear capability, Milhollin claims.

Milhollin then turned up State Department documents indicating that the West German Economic Ministry had known about Hempel since 1981, but was too probusiness to perform more than a cursory check of his company. It had simply ignored a slew of U.S. government communiqués urging action.

Milhollin recalls that after he published a research report on Hempel in the newspaper *Der Spiegel*, the country’s opposition parties invited him to testify before the West German parliament at a series of investigations on nuclear crimes. His testimony led both to charges that West Germany had violated the NPT and to a second audit of Hempel’s company, which this time unearthed some of the illegal transfers.

More recently, Israel agreed to return 10.5 tons of heavy water purchased from Norway for use in reactors that Israel subsequently transferred to make nuclear bombs. Milhollin became personally involved in the case, advising the Norwegian parliament to negotiate with Israel. “That was a real victory for us, because without the Wisconsin Project, the issue never would have come up,” he maintains.

Other project coups include the 1988 exposé of the Norwegian sale to a West German company of 15 tons of heavy water that was diverted through Switzerland to the Middle East and disappeared into the black market. The project also publicized the propensity of West German firms to supply the third world with equipment—in particular, selling a multimillion-dollar uranium conversion plant, steel, electronics, and a tritium-producing reactor to Pakistan, then later helping rival India to obtain heavy water (with help from Alfred Hempel). And in July 1990, the project published information about IBM’s attempts to sell a supercomputer that would help develop missiles for Iraq and Brazil.

More so than governments, the press counts on the Wisconsin Project. “Proliferation is so arcane that if you don’t have a specialist, the bureaucracy will run you over,” Scott Armstrong says. “Because of Gary Milhollin, we understand nuclear weapons better than conventional ones.”

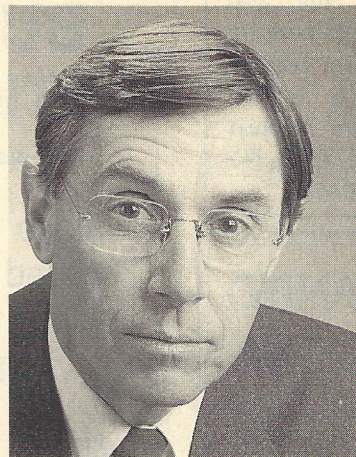
Clearly, Milhollin’s juridical technique of gathering evidence, putting international scofflaws on the stand in the court of world opinion, and pursuing justice is effective. Other think tanks and activists should note the unique relationship he has built with the authorities, as a kind of annoying but crucial adviser—“someone who sometimes advances their interests and sometimes doesn’t,” as Milhollin says. Wielding facts, not just positions, he’s able to maintain access to the powerful. He’s useful to them—doing what they have neither the resources nor the freedom to do.

“I know my name comes up frequently,” Milhollin says. “They’ve had witch hunts to find out who’s been talking to me. Sometimes foreign governments come and complain about me to the State Department, but there’s been no effort to quiet me down. It

would wind up on the front page!” Nor has he had security or sabotage concerns, noting, “We have an ordinary lock on our door.”

Milhollin is now viewed less as an opponent of the Bush administration than he once was, but he disagrees with policymakers on how to handle proliferation issues. He says the administration hasn’t been willing to take the initiative, much less make the necessary crackdown. “I’d put proliferation a lot higher on our list of priorities than the State Department does,” he says. “This administration has been practically brain dead on this issue. It doesn’t want

to think about Japan getting the bomb. It’s massive denial.”



GARY MILHOLLIN

National Security versus Commercial Interest

To halt proliferation, the superpowers must wield whatever clout they still possess, starting in their own backyards. “The U.S. has been the biggest producer and exporter of high technology in the world. Its export policies are necessarily the standard by which other countries can be judged,” says Milhollin. Also, “if the Soviets are selling to everybody, the Warsaw Pact nations aren’t going to restrain themselves.”

First, we must reevaluate the wisdom of selling supercomputers and other materials to proliferator nations. “It’s a question of risk,” Milhollin points out. “All the institutions that want a supercomputer are either in the process of making nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles. It’s not as if some benign institution wants to import these machines for civilian purposes.” Nuclear export policies, he says, should be keyed to need. “We’ve been supporting Israel with foreign aid. We could and should cut them off to force them to give up their bomb.”

Second, Milhollin wants Congress to act, exposing records of the sale of sensitive items to public scrutiny. De-

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spite their potential for nuclear proliferation, these transactions are closed, to protect U.S. trade positions. "It's a question of national security versus commercial interest," he says. "I think national security ought to prevail."

Obstacles notwithstanding, the Wisconsin Project—with its growing prestige and bank of knowledge—is increasingly influential. Could the individual approach be effective in researching and affecting other areas of arms control? Milhollin says yes, but cautions, "for a private individual to have much of an impact takes a tremendous amount of work."

Milhollin's vision of work to be done in the next decade centers on what he calls nuclear balkanization. "The world is not looking predictable, but we've still got the bomb," he states. As European nations become more independent, "there's going to be less possibility of our influencing their exports through diplomatic pressure."

The project is currently exploring whether trade with the East bloc will lead to a diversion of critical technology for nuclear weapons to the third world through that region. A united Germany may pose a particular threat because of its dominance in Europe. "NATO is going to wither away, and Germany is going to do as it damn pleases," says Milhollin. "It's going to ignore, more than ever before, other countries' complaints about its export behavior."

However, as Milhollin sees it, this chaotic danger may well improve relationships between the superpowers through cooperation in reducing nuclear proliferation. To exploit the shifting landscape, Milhollin advocates taking a tough economic stance to forestall further proliferation. "We ought to get the East Europeans to clean up this behavior as a ticket to Western affluence." Moreover, sanctions should be sharp: "Let countries know that if they get nuclear weapons, they'll give up all trade and aid with the rest of the world." This wallet-wise method will work, he says. "Who wants to freeze in the dark hugging an atomic bomb?"

Miranda Spencer is a freelance writer from the New York area who frequently contributes to Nuclear Times.



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