

# Nuclear Weapons and the Other in the Western Imagination

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Think . . . what the world would be like if Saddam Hussein would have a nuclear weapon. First of all, it would change the balance of power. Second of all, he would use it. And that would be most disastrous.

—Dan Quayle, U.S. Vice President 1988–92

We cannot, to paraphrase Lincoln, have a world half nuclear and half nuclear free.

—David McReynolds, War Resisters League (e-mail message to abolition-caucus@igc.apc.org, September 17, 1996)

There is a common perception in the West that nuclear weapons are most dangerous when they are in the hands of Third World leaders. I first became interested in this perception while interviewing nuclear weapons designers for an ethnographic study of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL)—one of three laboratories where U.S. nuclear weapons are designed (Gusterson 1996). I made a point of asking each scientist if he or she thought nuclear weapons would be used in my lifetime. Almost all said that they thought it unlikely that the United States or the Russians would initiate the use of nuclear weapons, but most thought that nuclear weapons would probably be used—by a Third World country.

The laboratory took a similar position as an institution. For example, using terminology with distinctly colonial overtones to argue for continued weapons research after the end of the Cold War, an official laboratory pamphlet said,

Political, diplomatic, and military experts believe that wars of the future will most likely be “tribal conflicts” between neighboring Third World countries or between ethnic groups in the same country. While the Cold War may be over, these small disputes may be more dangerous than a war between the superpowers, because smaller nations with deep-seated grievances against each other may lack the restraint that has been exercised by the US and the USSR. The existence of such potential conflicts and the continued danger of nuclear holocaust underscore the need for continued weapons research. [LLNL 1990: 1]

It is not only nuclear weapons scientists who believe that nuclear weapons are much safer in the hands of the established nuclear powers than in those of Third World countries. There has long been a widespread perception among U.S. defense intellectuals, politicians, and pundits—leaders of opinion on nuclear weapons—that, while we can live with the nuclear weapons of the five official nuclear nations for the indefinite future, the proliferation of nuclear weapons to nuclear-threshold states in the Third World, especially the Islamic world, would be enormously dangerous. This orthodoxy is so much a part of our collective common sense that, like all common sense, it can usually be stated as simple fact without fear of contradiction (Geertz 1983). It is widespread in the media and in learned journals,<sup>1</sup> and it is shared by liberals as well as conservatives. For example, just as Kenneth Adelman, a senior official in the Reagan administration, has said that “the real danger comes from some miserable Third World country which decides to use these weapons either out of desperation or incivility” (1988), at the same time Hans Bethe—a physicist revered by many for his work on behalf of disarmament over many decades—has said, “There have to be nuclear weapons in the hands of more responsible countries to deter such use” by Third World nations (Bernard 1994, quoted in Shroyer 1998:24).

Western alarmism about the dangers of nuclear weapons in Third World hands was particularly evident when India and Pakistan set off their salvos of nuclear tests in May 1998. Many analysts had already identified South Asia as the most likely site in the world for a nuclear war. After India’s tests, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Democrat, New York) said, “If Pakistan tests the bomb, we are on the edge of nuclear warfare” (1998). Three days later, following Pakistan’s tests, Moynihan elicited agreement from Senator John McCain (Republican, Arizona) when he said that the world was “closer to nuclear war than we have been any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis” (Abrams 1998). Speaking to Reuters wire service, David Albright, president of the liberal Institute for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., opined, “I don’t think they [India and Pakistan] are up to the task of preventing a conventional conflict from accidentally slipping into a nuclear exchange.”<sup>2</sup> *The Washington Post* agreed: “Today, in the aftermath of a series of test explosions set off by the bitter rivals, there is no place on earth with greater potential for triggering a nuclear war” (Moore and Khan 1998:1).

Eight years earlier there was a similar burst of alarmism over the prospect of an Iraqi nuclear weapon. In November 1990, when American opinion was still badly divided over the prospect of a war with Iraq, opinion polls suggested that more Americans were willing to go to war with Iraq to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons than to liberate Kuwait or to assure U.S. access to oil (Albright and Hibbs 1991; Gordon 1990). In the national debate leading up to the Gulf War, most American opinion makers agreed that Iraq should not be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons. Even those who accused the Bush administration of exaggerating the immediate danger in its search for a rationale for the U.S. military buildup in the Persian Gulf agreed that a line would eventually have to be drawn. For example, a *Christian Science Monitor* editorial criticized

the Bush administration's "scare-of-the-week campaign" but concluded apropos Iraq's nuclear program that "it may be . . . that ultimately force will be required to end it" (1990:20). Many were not prepared to exercise even such short-term restraint. For example, in August 1990, former Reagan administration arms control official Richard Perle advised immediate bombing of Iraq in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece (1990); columnist William Safire was by November advocating preventive war in *The New York Times* (1990b); another *New York Times* columnist, A. M. Rosenthal, who has written that "unutterably many will die one day if we allow Saddam to hide and keep his weapons of mass murder" (1998:A27), was recommending an American ultimatum to Iraq to dismantle its nuclear program or have it bombed (1990); and Senator John McCain had called for a military attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities even before the invasion of Kuwait (Kranish 1990). Whether they favored immediate military action or diplomatic efforts first, commentators across the political spectrum agreed that an Iraqi nuclear weapon would be intolerable; the only question was how to prevent it.

### Nuclear Orientalism

According to the literature on risk in anthropology, shared fears often reveal as much about the identities and solidarities of the fearful as about the actual dangers that are feared (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Lindenbaum 1974). The immoderate reactions in the West to the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan, and to Iraq's nuclear weapons program earlier, are examples of an entrenched discourse on nuclear proliferation that has played an important role in structuring the Third World, and our relation to it, in the Western imagination. This discourse, dividing the world into nations that can be trusted with nuclear weapons and those that cannot, dates back, at least, to the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1970.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty embodied a bargain between the five countries that had nuclear weapons in 1970 and those countries that did not. According to the bargain, the five official nuclear states (the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, and China)<sup>3</sup> promised to assist other signatories to the treaty in acquiring nuclear energy technology as long as they did not use that technology to produce nuclear weapons, submitting to international inspections when necessary to prove their compliance. Further, in Article 6 of the treaty, the five nuclear powers agreed to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament" (Blacker and Duffy 1976:395). One hundred eighty-seven countries have signed the treaty, but Israel, India, and Pakistan have refused, saying it enshrines a system of global "nuclear apartheid." Although the Non-Proliferation Treaty divided the countries of the world into nuclear and nonnuclear by means of a purely temporal metric<sup>4</sup>—designating only those who had tested nuclear weapons by 1970 as nuclear powers—the treaty has become the legal anchor for a global nuclear regime that is increasingly legitimated in Western public discourse in racialized terms. In view of recent

developments in global politics—the collapse of the Soviet threat and the recent war against Iraq, a nuclear-threshold nation in the Third World—the importance of this discourse in organizing Western geopolitical understandings is only growing. It has become an increasingly important way of legitimating U.S. military programs in the post-Cold War world since the early 1990s, when U.S. military leaders introduced the term *rogue states* into the American lexicon of fear, identifying a new source of danger just as the Soviet threat was declining (Klare 1995).

Thus in Western discourse nuclear weapons are represented so that “theirs” are a problem whereas “ours” are not. During the Cold War the Western discourse on the dangers of “nuclear proliferation” defined the term in such a way as to sever the two senses of the word *proliferation*. This usage split off the “vertical” proliferation of the superpower arsenals (the development of new and improved weapons designs and the numerical expansion of the stockpiles) from the “horizontal” proliferation of nuclear weapons to other countries, presenting only the latter as the “proliferation problem.” Following the end of the Cold War, the American and Russian arsenals are being cut to a few thousand weapons on each side.<sup>5</sup> However, the United States and Russia have turned back appeals from various nonaligned nations, especially India, for the nuclear powers to open discussions on a global convention abolishing nuclear weapons. Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty notwithstanding, the Clinton administration has declared that nuclear weapons will play a role in the defense of the United States for the indefinite future. Meanwhile, in a controversial move, the Clinton administration has broken with the policy of previous administrations in basically formalizing a policy of using nuclear weapons against nonnuclear states to deter chemical and biological weapons (Panofsky 1998; Sloyan 1998).

The dominant discourse that stabilizes this system of nuclear apartheid in Western ideology is a specialized variant within a broader system of colonial and postcolonial discourse that takes as its essentialist premise a profound Otherness separating Third World from Western countries.<sup>6</sup> This inscription of Third World (especially Asian and Middle Eastern) nations as ineradicably different from our own has, in a different context, been labeled “Orientalism” by Edward Said (1978). Said argues that orientalist discourse constructs the world in terms of a series of binary oppositions that produce the Orient as the mirror image of the West: where “we” are rational and disciplined, “they” are impulsive and emotional; where “we” are modern and flexible, “they” are slaves to ancient passions and routines; where “we” are honest and compassionate, “they” are treacherous and uncultivated. While the blatantly racist orientalism of the high colonial period has softened, more subtle orientalist ideologies endure in contemporary politics. They can be found, as Akhil Gupta (1998) has argued, in discourses of economic development that represent Third World nations as child nations lagging behind Western nations in a uniform cycle of development or, as Lutz and Collins (1993) suggest, in the imagery of popular magazines, such as *National Geographic*. I want to suggest here that another variant of contemporary orientalist ideology is also to be found in U.S. national security discourse.

Following Anthony Giddens (1979), I define *ideology* as a way of constructing political ideas, institutions, and behavior which (1) makes the political structures and institutions created by dominant social groups, classes, and nations appear to be naturally given and inescapable rather than socially constructed; (2) presents the interests of elites as if they were universally shared; (3) obscures the connections between different social and political antagonisms so as to inhibit massive, binary confrontations (i.e., revolutionary situations); and (4) legitimates domination. The Western discourse on nuclear proliferation is ideological in all four of these senses: (1) it makes the simultaneous ownership of nuclear weapons by the major powers and the absence of nuclear weapons in Third World countries seem natural and reasonable while problematizing attempts by such countries as India, Pakistan, and Iraq to acquire these weapons; (2) it presents the security needs of the established nuclear powers as if they were everybody's; (3) it effaces the continuity between Third World countries' nuclear deprivation and other systematic patterns of deprivation in the underdeveloped world in order to inhibit a massive north-south confrontation; and (4) it legitimates the nuclear monopoly of the recognized nuclear powers.

In the following pages I examine four popular arguments against horizontal nuclear proliferation and suggest that all four are ideological and orientalist. The arguments are that (1) Third World countries are too poor to afford nuclear weapons; (2) deterrence will be unstable in the Third World; (3) Third World regimes lack the technical maturity to be trusted with nuclear weapons; and (4) Third World regimes lack the political maturity to be trusted with nuclear weapons.

Each of these four arguments could as easily be turned backwards and used to delegitimize Western nuclear weapons, as I show in the following commentary. Sometimes, in the specialized literature of defense experts, one finds frank discussion of near accidents, weaknesses, and anomalies in deterrence as it has been practiced by the established nuclear powers, but these admissions tend to be quarantined in specialized discursive spaces where the general public has little access to them and where it is hard to connect them to the broader public discourse on nuclear proliferation.<sup>7</sup> In this article I retrieve some of these discussions of flaws in deterrence from their quarantined spaces and juxtapose them with the dominant discourse on the dangers of proliferation in order to destabilize its foundational assumption of a secure binary distinction between "the West" and "the Third World." It is my argument that, in the production of this binary distinction, possible fears and ambivalences about Western nuclear weapons are purged and recast as intolerable aspects of the Other. This purging and recasting occurs in a discourse characterized by gaps and silences in its representation of our own nuclear weapons and exaggerations in its representation of the Other's. Our discourse on proliferation is a piece of ideological machinery that transforms anxiety-provoking ambiguities into secure dichotomies.

I should clarify two points here. First, I am not arguing that there are, finally, no differences between countries in terms of their reliability as custodians of nuclear weapons. I am arguing that those differences are complex, ambiguous, and crosscutting in ways that are not captured by a simple binary division between,

on the one hand, a few countries that have nuclear weapons and insist they are safe and, on the other hand, those countries that do not have nuclear weapons and are told they cannot safely acquire them. It is my goal here to demonstrate the ways in which this simple binary distinction works as an ideological mechanism to impede a more nuanced and realistic assessment of the polymorphous dangers posed by nuclear weapons in all countries and to obscure recognition of the ways in which our own policies in the West have often exacerbated dangers in the Third World that, far from being simply the problems of the Other, are problems produced by a world system dominated by First World institutions and states.

Finally, while this article intervenes at the level of the way we talk about policy, it does not advocate a particular nuclear policy. My own politics are broadly antinuclear, and the logic of the issues discussed here leads me at least in the direction of nuclear abolition. Still, my critique of the nuclear double standard does also draw on arguments advanced by some, such as Kenneth Waltz, who have advocated the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, and I recognize that different nonorientalist constructions of the risks and benefits of nuclear weaponry are sustainable. As I will discuss in the conclusion, a nonorientalist discourse on proliferation could point in the direction of abolition, but it could also be compatible with quite different policy positions.

### **Four Common Arguments against Nuclear Proliferation**

#### *1. Third World Countries Are Too Poor to Afford Nuclear Weapons*

It is often said that it is inappropriate for Third World countries to squander money on nuclear (or conventional) weapons when they have such pressing problems of poverty, hunger, and homelessness on which the money might more appropriately be spent. Western disapprobation of Third World military spending was particularly marked when India conducted its “peaceful nuclear explosion” in May 1974. At the time one Washington official, condemning India for having the wrong priorities, was quoted as saying, “I don’t see how this is going to grow more rice” (*New York Times* 1974a:8). The next day the *New York Times* picked up the theme in its editorial page:

The more appropriate reaction [to the nuclear test] would be one of despair that such great talent and resources have been squandered on the vanity of power, while 600 million Indians slip deeper into poverty. The sixth member of the nuclear club may be passing the begging bowl before the year is out because Indian science and technology so far have failed to solve the country’s fundamental problems of food and population. [*New York Times* 1974b]

Similar comments were made after India’s nuclear tests of 1998. Mary McGrory, for example, wrote in her column in the *Washington Post* that “two large, poor countries in desperate need of schools, hospitals, and education are strewing billions of dollars for nuclear development” (1998b:C1); and Rupert Cornwell, writing in the *British Independent*, said that “a country as poor as

India should not be wasting resources on weapons that might only tempt a preemptive strike by an adversary; it is economic lunacy" (1998:9).

Such statements are not necessarily wrong, but, read with a critical eye, they have a recursive effect that potentially undermines the rationale for military programs in the West as well. First, one can interrogate denunciations of profligate military spending in the Third World by pointing out that Western countries, despite their own extravagant levels of military spending, have by no means solved their own social and economic problems. The United States, for example, which allots 4 percent of its GNP (over \$250 billion per year) to military spending against India's 2.8 percent (Gokhale 1996), financed the arms race of the 1980s by accumulating debt—its own way of passing the begging bowl—at a rate of over \$200 billion each year. Meanwhile in America advocates for the homeless estimate that 2 million Americans have nowhere to live,<sup>8</sup> and another 36 million Americans live below the official poverty line (Mattern 1998). The infant mortality rate is lower for black children in Botswana than for those in the United States (Edelman 1991). As any observant pedestrian in the urban United States knows, it is not only Indians who need to beg.

Second, American taxpayers have consistently been told that nuclear weapons are a bargain compared with the cost of conventional weapons. They give "more bang for the buck." If this is true for "us," then surely it is also true for "them": if a developing nation has security concerns, then a nuclear weapon ought to be the cheapest way to take care of them (Rathjens 1982:267).

Third, critics of U.S. military spending have been told for years that military spending stimulates economic development and produces such beneficial economic spin-offs that it almost pays for itself. If military Keynesianism works for "us," it is hard to see why it should not also work for "them." And indeed, "Indian decision-makers have perceived high investments in nuclear research as a means to generate significant long-term industrial benefits in electronics, mining, metallurgy and other non-nuclear sectors of the economy" (Potter 1982:157).

In other words, "they" may use the same legitimating arguments as "we" do on behalf of nuclear weapons. The arguments we use to defend our weapons could as easily be used to defend theirs. We can only argue otherwise by using a double standard.

## *2. Deterrence Will Be Unstable in the Third World*

During the Cold War Americans were told that nuclear deterrence prevented the smoldering enmity between the superpowers from bursting into the full flame of war, saving millions of lives by making conventional war too dangerous. When the practice of deterrence was challenged by the antinuclear movement of the 1980s, Pentagon officials and defense intellectuals warned us that nuclear disarmament would just make the world safe for conventional war.<sup>9</sup> Surely, then, we should want countries such as Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Israel also to enjoy the stabilizing benefits of nuclear weapons.

This is, in fact, precisely the argument made by the father of the Pakistani bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan. He said at a press conference in 1998, alluding to the fact that Pakistan had a nuclear capability for many years before its actual nuclear tests, "The nuclear weapon is a peace guarantor. It gave peace to Europe, it gave peace to us. . . . I believe my work has saved this country for the last twenty years from many wars" (NNI-News 1998). Western security specialists and media pundits have argued, on the other hand, that deterrence as practiced by the superpowers during the Cold War may not work in Third World settings because Third World adversaries tend to share common borders and because they lack the resources to develop secure second-strike capabilities. On closer examination these arguments, plausible enough at first, turn out to be deeply problematic, especially in their silences about the risks of deterrence as practiced by the superpowers. I shall take them in turn.

First, there is the argument that deterrence may not work for countries, such as India and Pakistan, that share a common border and can therefore attack one another very quickly.<sup>10</sup> As one commentator put it,

In the heating conflict between India and Pakistan, one of the many dangers to be reckoned with is there would be no time for caution.

While it would have taken more than a half-hour for a Soviet-based nuclear missile to reach the United States—time at least for America to double-check its computer screen or use the hotline—the striking distance between India and Pakistan is no more than five minutes.

That is not enough time to confirm a threat or even think twice before giving the order to return fire, and perhaps mistakenly incinerate an entire nation. [Lev 1998:A19]

This formulation focuses only on the difference in missile flight times while ignoring other countervailing differences in missile configurations that would make deterrence in South Asia look more stable than deterrence as practiced by the superpowers. Such a view overlooks the fact that the missiles deployed by the two superpowers were, by the end of the Cold War, MIRVed and extraordinarily accurate. MIRVed missiles—those equipped with Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles—carry several warheads, each capable of striking a different target. The MX, for example, was designed to carry ten warheads, each capable of landing within 100 feet of a separate target. The unprecedented accuracy of the MX, together with the fact that one MX missile could—in theory at least—destroy ten Soviet missiles, made it, as some arms controllers worried at the time, a destabilizing weapon that, together with its Russian counterparts, put each superpower in a "use-it-or-lose-it" situation whereby it would have to launch its missiles immediately if it believed itself under attack. Thus, once one adds accuracy and MIRVing to the strategic equation, the putative contrast between stable deterrence in the West and unstable deterrence in South Asia looks upside down, even if one were to grant the difference in flight times between the Cold War superpowers and between the main adversaries in South Asia.

But there is no reason to grant the alleged difference in flight times. Lev says that it would have taken “more than half an hour” for American and Russian missiles to reach their targets during the Cold War (1998:A19). While this was more or less true for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), it was not true for the submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) the superpowers moved in against each other’s coasts; these were about ten minutes of flight time from their targets. Nor was it true of the American Jupiter missiles stationed in Turkey, right up against the Soviet border, in the early 1960s. Nor was it true of the Pershing IIs deployed in Germany in the 1980s. When the antinuclear movement claimed that it was destabilizing to move the Pershings to within less than ten minutes of flight time of Moscow, the U.S. government insisted that anything that strengthened NATO’s attack capability strengthened nuclear deterrence. Here again one sees a double standard in the arguments made to legitimate “our” nuclear weapons.

Finally, even if we were to accept that the superpowers would have half-an-hour’s warning against five minutes for countries in South Asia, to think that this matters is to be incited to a discourse based on the absurd premise that there is any meaningful difference between half an hour and five minutes for a country that believes itself under nuclear attack (see Foucault 1980a: ch. 1). While half an hour does leave more time to verify warnings of an attack, would any sane national leadership feel any safer irrevocably launching nuclear weapons against an adversary in half an hour rather than five minutes? In either case, the time frame for decision making is too compressed.

In other words, the argument about missile flight times, quite apart from the fact that it misrepresents the realities of deterrence between the superpowers, is a red herring. What really matters is not the geographical proximity of the adversarial nations but, rather, their confidence that each could survive an attack by the other with some sort of retaliatory capability. Many analysts have argued that newly nuclear nations with small arsenals would lack a secure second-strike capability. Their nuclear weapons would therefore invite rather than deter a preemptive or preventive attack, especially in a crisis. Thus the *New York Times* editorialized that “unlike the superpowers, India and Pakistan will have small, poorly protected nuclear stocks. No nation in that situation can be sure that its weapons could survive a nuclear attack” (1998:14). Similarly, British defense analyst Jonathan Power has written that “superpower theorists have long argued that stability is not possible unless there is an assured second-strike capability. . . . Neither India and [*sic*] Pakistan have the capability, as the superpowers did, to develop and build such a second-strike capability” (1997:29).

This argument has been rebutted by Kenneth Waltz (1982, 1995a, 1995b), a leading political scientist seen as a maverick for his views on nuclear proliferation. Waltz, refusing the binary distinction at the heart of the dominant discourse, suggests that horizontal nuclear proliferation could bring about what he calls “nuclear peace” in troubled regions of the globe just as, in his view, it stabilized the superpower relationship. Waltz argues that, although the numbers of weapons are different, the general mathematical principle of deterrence—the

appalling asymmetry of risk and reward—remains the same and may even, perversely, work more effectively in new nuclear nations. Waltz points out that it would take very few surviving nuclear weapons to inflict “unacceptable damage” on a Third World adversary: “Do we expect to lose one city or two, two cities or ten? When these are the pertinent questions, we stop thinking about running risks and start thinking about how to avoid them” (1995a:8). Waltz argues that, while a first strike would be fraught with terrifying uncertainties in any circumstances, the discussion of building secure retaliatory capabilities in the West has tended, ethnocentrically, to focus on the strategies the superpowers employed to do so: building vast arsenals at huge expense on land, at sea, and in the air. But Third World countries have cheaper, more low-tech options at their disposal too: “Nuclear warheads can be fairly small and light, and they are easy to hide and to move. People worry about terrorists stealing nuclear warheads because various states have so many of them. Everybody seems to believe that terrorists are capable of hiding bombs. Why should states be unable to do what terrorist gangs are thought to be capable of?” (Waltz 1995a:19). Waltz (1982, 1995a) also points out that Third World states could easily and cheaply confuse adversaries by deploying dummy nuclear weapons, and he reminds readers that the current nuclear powers (with the exception of the United States) all passed through and survived phases in their own nuclear infancy when their nuclear arsenals were similarly small and vulnerable.

The discourse on proliferation assumes that the superpowers’ massive interlocking arsenals of highly accurate MIRVed missiles deployed on hair-trigger alert and designed with first-strike capability backed by global satellite capability was stable and that the small, crude arsenals of new nuclear nations would be unstable, but one could quite plausibly argue the reverse. Indeed, as mentioned above, by the 1980s a number of analysts in the West were concerned that the MIRVing of missiles and the accuracy of new guidance systems were generating increasing pressure to strike first in a crisis. Although the strategic logic might be a little different, they saw temptations to preempt at the high end of the nuclear social system as well as at the low end (Aldridge 1983; Gray and Payne 1980; Scheer 1982). There were also concerns (explored in more detail below) that the complex computerized early-warning systems with which each superpower protected its weapons were generating false alarms that might lead to accidental war (Blair 1993; Sagan 1993). Thus one could argue—as former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (1986) and a number of others have—that deterrence between the United States and Russia would be safer and more stable if each side replaced their current massive strategic arsenals with a small force of about one hundred nuclear weapons—about the size India’s nuclear stockpile is believed to be, as it happens. Further, Bruce Blair (Blair, Feiveson, and von Hippel 1997), a former missile control officer turned strategic analyst, and Stansfield Turner (1997), a former CIA director, have suggested that the readiness posture of American and Russian nuclear forces makes them an accident waiting to happen. The United States and Russia, they argue, would be safer if they stored their warheads separate from their delivery vehicles—as,

it so happens, India and Pakistan do.<sup>11</sup> In the words of Scott Sagan, a political scientist and former Pentagon official concerned about U.S. nuclear weapons safety,

The United States should not try to make new nuclear nations become like the superpowers during the Cold War, with large arsenals ready to launch at a moment's notice for the sake of deterrence; instead, for the sake of safety, the United States and Russia should try to become more like some of the nascent nuclear states, maintaining very small nuclear capabilities, with weapons components separated and located apart from the delivery systems, and with civilian organizations controlling the warheads. [Sagan 1995:90–91]<sup>12</sup>

Given, as I have shown, that the crisis stability of large nuclear arsenals can also be questioned and that it is not immediately self-evident why the leader of, say, India today should feel any more confident that he would not lose a city or two in a preemptive strike on Pakistan than his U.S. counterpart would in attacking Russia, I want to suggest that an argument that appears on the surface to be about numbers and configurations of weapons is really, when one looks more closely, about the psychology and culture of people. Put simply, the dominant discourse assumes that leaders in the Third World make decisions differently than their counterparts in the West: that they are more likely to take risks, gambling millions of lives, or to make rash and irresponsible calculations.

### *3. Third World Governments Lack the Technical Maturity to Handle Nuclear Weapons*

The third argument against horizontal proliferation is that Third World nations may lack the technical maturity to be trusted with nuclear weapons. Brito and Intriligator, for example, tell us that “the new nuclear nations are likely to be less sophisticated technically and thus less able to develop safeguards against accident or unauthorized action” (1982:137). And the *Washington Post* quotes an unnamed Western diplomat stationed in Pakistan who, worrying that India and Pakistan lack the technology to detect an incoming attack on their weapons, said, the United States has “expensive space-based surveillance that could pick up the launches, but Pakistan and India have no warning systems. I don’t know what their doctrine will be. Launch when the wind blows?” (Anderson 1998:A1).

In terms of safety technologies, U.S. weapons scientists have over the years developed Insensitive High Explosive (IHE), which will not detonate if a weapon is—as has happened with U.S. nuclear weapons—accidentally dropped. U.S. weapons scientists have also developed Permissive Action Links (PALs), electronic devices that block the arming of nuclear weapons until the correct code is entered so that the weapons cannot be used if stolen and will not go off if there is an accident during routine transportation or storage of the weapons. Obviously the United States could, if it were deeply concerned about safety problems in new nuclear nations, share such safety technologies, as it offered to do with the Soviets during the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> It has chosen not to share its safety technologies with such nations as India and Pakistan partly out of concern that it would then be perceived as rewarding proliferation.

Quite aside from the question of whether the United States itself could discreetly do more to improve the safety of nuclear arsenals in new nuclear nations, if one reviews the U.S. nuclear safety record, the comforting dichotomy between a high-tech, safe “us” and the low-tech, unsafe “them” begins to look distinctly dubious. First, the United States has not always made use of the safety technologies at its disposal. Over the protests of some weapons designers, for example, the Navy decided not to incorporate state-of-the-art safety technologies into one of its newest weapons: the Trident II. The Trident II does not contain Insensitive High Explosive because IHE is heavier than ordinary high explosive and would, therefore, have reduced the number of warheads each missile could carry. The Trident II designers also decided to use 1.1 class propellant fuel rather than the less combustible, hence safer, 1.3 class fuel, because the former would give the missile a longer range. After the Trident II was deployed, a high-level review panel appointed by President Bush recommended recalling and re-designing it for safety reasons, but the panel was overruled partly because of the expense this would have involved (Drell, Foster, and Townes 1991; Smith 1990).

Second, turning to the surveillance and early-warning systems that the United States has but threshold nuclear nations lack, one finds that these systems bring with them special problems as well as benefits. For example, it was the high-technology Aegis radar system, misread by a navy operator, that was directly responsible for the tragically mistaken U.S. decision to shoot down an Iranian commercial jetliner on July 3, 1988, a blunder that cost innocent lives and could have triggered a war. Similarly, and potentially more seriously,

At 8:50 a.m., on November 9, 1979, the operational duty officers at NORAD—as well as in the SAC command post, at the Pentagon’s National Military Command Center (NMCC), and the alternate National Military Command Center (ANMCC) at Fort Richie, Maryland—were suddenly confronted with a realistic display of a Soviet nuclear attack apparently designed to decapitate the American command system and destroy U.S. nuclear forces: a large number of Soviet missiles appeared to have been launched, both SLBMs and ICBMs, in a full-scale attack on the United States. [Sagan 1993:228–229]

American interceptor planes were scrambled, the presidential “doomsday plane” took off (without the president) to coordinate a possible nuclear war, and air traffic controllers were told to bring down commercial planes before U.S. military commanders found that a training tape had mistakenly been inserted into the system (Sagan 1993:230).

More seriously still, on October 28, 1962, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis when the United States was at a high level of alert and had its nuclear weapons cocked at the ready, another accident with a training tape caused U.S. radar operators to believe that a missile had been launched at Florida from Cuba. When there was no nuclear detonation, they realized they had mistaken a satellite for a missile (Sagan 1993:130–131). Also during the Cuban Missile Crisis, at a time when sentries at U.S. military bases had been told to be alert to Soviet saboteurs, a bear climbing a fence at a base in Duluth was mistaken for a

saboteur, and the alarm set off throughout the region was, in Wisconsin, mistaken for the nuclear war alarm. An officer had to drive onto the runway to block the nuclear-armed F-106As, already taxiing, from taking off (Sagan 1993:1, 99).

Looking next at the U.S. safety record in transporting and handling nuclear weapons, again there is more cause for relief than for complacency. There have, for example, been at least twenty-four occasions when U.S. aircraft have accidentally released nuclear weapons and at least eight incidents in which U.S. nuclear weapons were involved in plane crashes or fires (Sagan 1993:185; Williams and Cantelon 1988:239–245). In 1980, during routine maintenance of a Titan II missile in Arkansas, an accident with a wrench caused a conventional explosion that sent the nuclear warhead 600 feet through the air (Barasch 1983:42). In another incident an H-bomb was accidentally dropped over North Carolina; only one safety switch worked, preventing the bomb from detonating (Barasch 1983:41). In 1966 two U.S. planes collided over Palomares, Spain, and four nuclear weapons fell to the ground, causing a conventional explosion that contaminated a large, populated area with plutonium. One hydrogen bomb was lost for three months. In 1968 a U.S. plane carrying four H-bombs caught fire over Greenland. The crew ejected, and there was a conventional explosion that scattered plutonium over a wide area (Sagan 1993:156–203).

None of these accidents produced *nuclear* explosions, but recent safety studies have concluded that this must partly be attributed to good luck. These studies revealed that the design of the W-79 nuclear artillery shell contained a previously unsuspected design flaw that could lead to an unintended nuclear explosion in certain circumstances. In consequence the artillery shells had to be secretly withdrawn from Europe in 1989 (Sagan 1993:184; Smith 1990).

In other words, the U.S. nuclear arsenal has its own safety problems related to its dependence on highly computerized warning and detection systems, its Cold War practice of patrolling oceans and skies with live nuclear weapons, and its large stockpile size. Even where U.S. scientists have developed special safety technologies, they are not always used. The presumption that Third World countries lack the technical competence to be trusted with nuclear weapons fits our stereotypes about these countries' backwardness, but it distracts us from asking whether we ourselves have the technical infallibility the weapons ideally require.

#### *4. Third World Regimes Lack the Political Maturity to Be Trusted with Nuclear Weapons*

The fourth argument concerns the supposed political instability or irrationality of Third World countries. Security specialists and media pundits worry that Third World dictators free from democratic constraints are more likely to develop and use nuclear weapons, that military officers in such countries will be more likely to take possession of the weapons or use them on their own initiative, or that Third World countries are more vulnerable to the kinds of ancient hatred and religious fanaticism that could lead to the use of nuclear weapons in anger. These concerns bring us to the heart of orientalist ideology.

The presumed contrast between the West, where leaders are disciplined by democracy, and the Third World, where they are not, is nicely laid out by non-proliferation expert William Potter:

Adverse domestic opinion may also serve as a constraint on the acquisition of nuclear weapons by some nations. Japan, West Germany, Sweden, and Canada are examples of democracies where public opposition could have a decided effect on nuclear weapons decisions. . . . The fear of adverse public opinion, on the other hand, might be expected to be marginal for many developing nations without a strong democratic tradition. [Potter 1982:143]<sup>14</sup>

This contrast does not hold up so well under examination. In 1983 Western European leaders ignored huge grassroots protests against the deployment of the Cruise and Pershing II missiles. President Reagan, likewise, pressed ahead vigorously with nuclear weapons testing and deployment in the face of one million people—probably the largest American protest ever—at the UN Disarmament Rally in New York on June 12, 1982, despite opinion polls that consistently showed strong support for a bilateral nuclear weapons freeze (McCrea and Markle 1989:111). And the governments of Britain, France, and Israel, not to mention the United States, all made their initial decisions to acquire nuclear weapons without any public debate or knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, of all the countries that have nuclear weapons, only in India was the question of whether or not to cross the nuclear threshold an election issue, with the Bharatiya Janata Party campaigning for office successfully in 1998 on a pledge to conduct nuclear tests. Pakistan also had a period of public debate before conducting its first nuclear test. Far from being constrained by public opinion on nuclear weapons, the Western democracies have felt quite free to ignore it.<sup>16</sup> Yet the idea that Western democracies live with their nuclear arms half tied behind their backs recurs over and over in the discourse on nuclear proliferation.

By contrast, Third World countries are often represented in the discourse on proliferation as countries lacking impulse control and led by fanatical, brutal, or narcissistic leaders who might misuse nuclear weapons. Defense Secretary William Cohen, for example, referred to India and Pakistan as countries “engaging in chauvinistic chest-pounding about their nuclear manhood” (Abrams 1998). Richard Perle, a leading arms control official in the Reagan administration, said,

Nuclear weapons, once thought of as the “great equalizer,” must now be seen differently. They are one thing in the hands of governments animated by rational policies to protect national interests and a normal regard for human life. They are quite another in the hands of a brutal megalomaniac like Saddam who wouldn’t blink at the mass destruction of his “enemies.” . . . The most formidable threat to our well-being would be a Saddam in possession of true weapons of mass destruction. . . . In any contest in which one side is bound by the norms of civilized behavior and the other is not, history is, alas, on the side of the barbarians. [1990:A8]<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Senator Edward Kennedy (Democrat, Massachusetts) warned that “nuclear weapons in the arsenals of unstable Third World regimes are a clear and present danger to all humanity. . . . Dictators threatened with attack along their borders or revolutions from within may not pause before pressing the button. The scenarios are terrifying” (1982:ix).

It is often also assumed in the discourse on proliferation that Third World nuclear weapons exist to serve the ends of despotic vanity or religious fanaticism and may be used without restraint. In the public discussion of India’s nuclear tests in 1998, for example, it was a recurrent theme that India conducted its nuclear tests out of a narcissistic desire for self-aggrandizement rather than for legitimate national security reasons. This image persists in spite of the fact that India, with a declared nuclear power (China) on one border and an undeclared nuclear power (Pakistan) on the other, might be thought to have reasons every bit as compelling as those of the five official nuclear powers to test nuclear weapons. Strategic analyst Michael Krepon said on *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, “These tests weren’t done for security purposes. . . . They were done for reasons of domestic politics and national pride. . . . We have street demonstrations to protest nuclear weapons. They have them to celebrate them” (1998). Meanwhile, in an article entitled “Nuclear Fear and Narcissism Shake South Asia,” a *New York Times* reporter, speaking of India as if it were a spoiled child, wrote that India, “tired of what it considers to be its own second-class status in world affairs . . . has gotten the attention it wanted” (Weisman 1998:16). Similarly, Senator Richard Lugar (Republican, Indiana) said that India tested in part because “there was a lot of indifference, under-appreciation of India. . . . We were not spending quality time in the Administration or Congress on India” (*Congressional Quarterly Weekly* 1998:1367–1368). And when Edward Teller, the so-called father of the hydrogen bomb, was asked if India and Pakistan were following his motto that “knowledge is good,” he replied, “These explosions have not been performed for knowledge. It may be to impress people. It may be a form of boasting” (Mayer 1998:B1).

The Western discourse on nuclear proliferation is also permeated by a recurrent anxiety that Third World nations will use nuclear weapons to pursue religious squabbles and crusades. Commentators particularly fear an “Islamic bomb” and a Muslim holy war. Said (1978:287) identified the fear of a Muslim holy war as one of the cornerstones of orientalist ideology. Senator Edward Kennedy worries about a scenario in which “Libya, determined to acquire nuclear weapons, receives a gift of the Bomb from Pakistan as an act of Islamic solidarity” (1982:ix). Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan warns that “you could have an Islamic bomb in no time, and God have mercy on us” (Associated Press 1998). Mary McGrory fears that “nothing is more important than keeping the ‘Islamic bomb’ out of the hands of Iran. Let it be introduced into the Middle East and you can kiss the world we know goodbye” (1998a:A3). The *San Francisco Examiner* quotes an analyst who explained Saddam Hussein’s willingness to forego \$100 billion in oil revenues rather than end his nuclear weapons program by saying, “The single most important reason is Saddam’s vision of his role in

history as a saviour of the Arab world. He is comparing himself with Saladin” (Kempster 1998:A17). Finally, syndicated columnist Morton Kondracke speculates about a despot “like the Shah of Iran” who “secretly builds an arsenal to increase his prestige”:

Then he is overthrown by a religious fanatic resembling the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who then uses some of the Shah’s bombs to intimidate or destroy neighboring countries. And other bombs he passes on to terrorists that will use them to wage holy wars.

Be glad that it didn’t happen in real life. But something like it could. [1983]

The Western discourse on proliferation also stresses the supposedly ancient quality of feuds and hatreds in South Asia and the Middle East. As British journalist Nigel Calder puts it, “In that troubled part of the world, where modern technology serves ancient bitterness and nuclear explosions seem like a just expression of the wrath of God, imagining sequences of events that could lead to a regional nuclear conflict is not difficult” (1979:83). Explaining why Pakistan named its new missile the Ghaury, Senator Moynihan said, “Ghaury was a Muslim prince who invaded India in the twelfth century. These things don’t go away” (1998). “Nuclear missiles named for ancient warriors will probably be deployed by two nations with a history of warfare, religious strife, and a simmering border dispute,” said an ABC News reporter (Wouters 1998). In this vein it was widely reported in the U.S. media that the Indian Prithvi missile was named after an ancient warrior-king and that India’s Agni missile was named for the god of fire (e.g., Marquand 1998). This widely circulated claim is particularly striking because, while it resonates with our stereotypes of Hindus enslaved to religion and tradition, it is quite untrue. The word *Prithvi* means “world” or “earth,” and *Agni* means fire itself and does not refer to a god. The Indians are naming their missiles after elements, not after warriors or gods (Ghosh 1998). Of course, if Western commentators were looking for a country that names its nuclear weapons after ancient gods and dead warriors, they need have looked no further than the United States, with its Jupiter, Thor, Poseidon, Atlas, Polaris, Minuteman, and Pershing missiles.

After dictators and religious fanatics, the Western imagination is most afraid of Third World military officers. The academics Brito and Intriligator, for example, tell us that Third World governments might acquire nuclear weapons “mainly for deterrence purposes but might not be able to control such weapons once they were available. . . . Unilateral initiatives by junior officers could lead to these weapons going off” (Brito and Intriligator 1982:140). One finds the same presumption in the writings of Nigel Calder, who also worries about Third World military officers: “An American or Russian general in Europe is not going to let off the first nuclear weapon on his own initiative, even in the heat of battle, but will the same discipline apply to . . . a Pakistani general who has a private nuclear theory about how to liberate Kashmir?” (1979:77).

Oliver North notwithstanding, it is taken as so obvious it does not need explaining that Third World junior officers, unlike our own, are prone to take

dangerous unilateral initiatives. Calder's passage only makes sense if one accepts the contrast it states as unquestionably natural. It is the kind of ideological statement that the French theorist Roland Barthes characterized as "falsely obvious" (1972:11). As Edward Said says, once a group has been orientalized, "virtually anything can be written or said about it, without challenge or demurral" (1978:287). This presumption that the Third World body politic cannot control its military loins is, I believe, a coded or metaphorical way of discussing a more general lack of control over impulses, a pervasive lack of discipline, assumed to afflict people of color.

But what if one tries to turn these contrasts inside out, asking whether the historical behavior of the Western nuclear powers might also give rise to concerns about undemocratic nuclear bullying, religious fanaticism, and unilateral initiatives by military officers? Because of its contradictions, gaps, and silences, the discourse on proliferation can always be read backward so that our gaze is directed not toward the Other but toward the author. Then the flaws and double standards of the discourse are illuminated. Thus, instead of asking whether Third World countries can be trusted with nuclear weapons, one can ask, how safe are the official nuclear powers from coups d'état, renegade officers, or reckless leaders?

Pursuing this line of inquiry, one notices that France came perilously close to revolution as recently as 1968 and that in 1961 a group of renegade French military officers took control of a nuclear weapon at France's nuclear test site in the Sahara Desert (Aepfel 1987; Spector 1990:18). Britain, struggling to repress IRA bombing campaigns, has been engaged in low-level civil war for most of the time it has possessed nuclear weapons. The United States has, since it acquired nuclear weapons, seen one president (Kennedy) assassinated and another president (Reagan) wounded by a gunman.

There have been problems with the U.S. military also. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, a group of military officers at Malmstrom Air Force Base rigged their missiles so that they could launch their nuclear weapons independently of the national command and control structure and outside of normal procedures requiring multiple officers to enable a launch (Sagan 1993:81–91, 1995:78–79). In January 1963 a U.S. Air Force officer admitted to having tampered with the safety devices on a bomber's nuclear weapons, illegally disabling them (Sagan 1993:189). During the 1950s, although this conflicted with presidential policy, "preventive nuclear attacks [against the Soviets] were clearly imagined, actively planned and vigorously advocated by senior U.S. military leaders" (Sagan 1995:62). One of these leaders was General Curtis LeMay, who, by 1954, had "begun raising the ante with the Soviet Union on his own, covertly and extralegally" (Rhodes 1995:564), by sending U.S. reconnaissance flights over the USSR—technically an act of war—despite President Truman's orders not to do so. And General Horace Wade had the following to say about a successor to LeMay as head of the Strategic Air Command, General Thomas Power, in the early 1960s: "He was . . . a hard, cruel individual . . . I would like to say this. I used to worry about General Power. I used to worry that General Power was not stable.

I used to worry about the fact that he had control over so many weapons and weapons systems and could, under certain conditions, launch the force” (U.S. Air Force 1978:307–309, quoted in Sagan 1993:150).

Although the United States is not a theocracy, the American people have their own sense of manifest destiny and divine calling that is not always so different from that of the Islamic fundamentalists whose nuclear ambitions they so fear. Major General Orvil Anderson was a military officer who, in distinctly Manichean terms, publicly advocated a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union (and lost his job for it). He said, “Give me the order to do it and I can break up Russia’s A-bomb nests in a week. . . . And when I went up to Christ—I think I could explain to him that I had saved Civilization” (Stevens 1958, quoted in Sagan 1995: n. 25). Nor is Anderson’s sense that the use of nuclear weapons would be sanctioned by God unique: in the course of my own research I have interviewed American nuclear weapons scientists who believe that Christ would have pushed the button to bomb Hiroshima and that nuclear weapons are part of God’s plan to end the world as a prelude to the Day of Judgment and the Second Coming (Gusterson 1996, 1997; see also Mojtabai 1986). One can easily imagine the Western media’s response if Indian or Pakistani generals or weapons scientists were to say such things!

Finally, U.S. leaders have sometimes treated nuclear weapons not as the ultimate weapons of self-defense and last resort but as weapons that can be used to threaten adversaries in the pursuit of America’s interests and values abroad. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (during which President Kennedy put the chance of nuclear war “somewhere between one out of three and even”) is only the best known of these gambles (Sagan 1993:54). Other examples include the following: President Eisenhower threatened to use nuclear weapons against the Chinese, who did not then possess nuclear weapons of their own, in Korea in 1953 and in Quemoy-Matsu in 1954–55; Truman and Eisenhower sent military signals that the use of nuclear weapons was a possibility during the first Berlin Crisis, in 1949, and the second Quemoy-Matsu crisis, in 1958; and Henry Kissinger repeatedly conveyed President Nixon’s threats of nuclear escalation to the North Vietnamese between 1969 and 1972 (Bundy 1988:238–239, 266–270, 277–283, 384; Cheng 1988; Ellsberg 1981:v–vi). During the Vietnam War, Barry Goldwater ran for president as the Republican nominee advocating consideration of the use of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons to defoliate the jungles of Vietnam.

### **The Orientalist Underworld: A Tour of Images**

These falsely obvious arguments about the political unreliability of Third World nuclear powers are, I have been arguing, part of a broader orientalist rhetoric that seeks to bury disturbing similarities between “us” and “them” in a discourse that systematically produces the Third World as Other. In the process of producing the Third World, we also produce ourselves, for the Orient, one of the West’s “deepest and most recurring images of the other,” is essential in

defining the West “as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said 1978:1–2).

The particular images and metaphors that recur in the discourse on proliferation represent Third World nations as criminals, women, and children. But these recurrent images and metaphors, all of which pertain in some way to disorder, can also be read as telling hints about the facets of our own psychology and culture which we find especially troubling in regard to our custodianship over nuclear weapons. The metaphors and images are part of the ideological armor the West wears in the nuclear age, but they are also clues that suggest buried, denied, and troubling parts of ourselves that have mysteriously surfaced in our distorted representations of the Other. As Akhil Gupta has argued in his analysis of a different orientalist discourse, the discourse on development, “within development discourse . . . lies its shadowy double . . . a virtual presence, inappropriate objects that serve to open up the ‘developed world’ itself as an inappropriate object” (1998:4).

In the era of so-called rogue states, one recurrent theme in this system of representations is that of the thief, liar, and criminal: the very attempt to come into possession of nuclear weapons is often cast in terms of racketeering and crime. After the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, one newspaper headline read, “G-8 Nations Move to Punish Nuclear Outlaws” (Reid 1998:1), thereby characterizing the two countries as criminals even though neither had signed—and hence violated—either the Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. When British customs officers intercepted a shipment of krytrons destined for Iraq’s nuclear weapons program, one newspaper account said that Saddam Hussein was “caught red-handed trying to *steal* atomic detonators” (Perlmutter 1990, emphasis added)—a curious choice of words given that Iraq had paid good money to buy the krytrons from the company EG&G. (In fact, if any nation can be accused of theft here, surely it is the United States, which took \$650 million from Pakistan for a shipment of F-16s, cancelled the shipment when the Bush administration determined that Pakistan was seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, but never refunded the money.) According to an article in the *New York Times*, “it required more than three decades, a global network of theft and espionage, and uncounted millions for Pakistan, one of the world’s poorest countries, to explode that bomb” (Weiner 1998:6). Meanwhile the same paper’s editorial page lamented that “for years Pakistan has lied to the U.S. about not having a nuclear weapons program” and insisted that the United States “punish Pakistan’s perfidy on the Bomb” (*New York Times* 1987a:A34, 1987b:A34). And Representative Stephen Solarz (Democrat, New York) warns that the bomb will give Pakistan “the nuclear equivalent of a Saturday Night Special” (Smith 1988:38). The image of the Saturday night special assimilates Pakistan symbolically to the disorderly underworld of ghetto hoodlums who rob corner stores and fight gang wars. U.S. nuclear weapons are, presumably, more like the “legitimate” weapons carried by the police to maintain order and keep the peace.<sup>18</sup>

Reacting angrily to this system of representations, the scientist in charge of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, Abdul Qadeer Khan, said, "Anything which we do is claimed by the West as stolen and we are never given credit except for the things like heroin. . . . You think that we people who also got education are stupid, ignorant. Things which you could do fifty years ago, don't you think that we cannot do them now" (NNI-News 1998).

Third World nations acquiring nuclear weapons are also described in terms of passions escaping control. In Western discourse the passionate, or instinctual, has long been identified with women and animals and implicitly contrasted with male human rationality (Haraway 1990; Merchant 1980; Rosaldo 1974). Thus certain recurrent figures of speech in the Western discourse on proliferation cast proliferant nations in the Third World in imagery that carries a subtle feminine or subhuman connotation. Whereas the United States is spoken of as having "vital interests" and "legitimate security needs," Third World nations have "passions," "longings," and "yearnings" for nuclear weapons which must be controlled and contained by the strong male and adult hand of America. Pakistan has "an evident ardor for the Bomb," says a *New York Times* editorial (1987a:A34). Peter Rosenfeld, writing in the *Washington Post*, worries that the United States cannot forever "stifle [Pakistan's] nuclear longings" (1987:A27). Representative Ed Markey (Democrat, Massachusetts), agreeing, warns in a letter to the *Washington Post* that America's weakness in its relationship with Pakistan means that the Pakistanis "can feed nuclear passions at home and still receive massive military aid from America" (1987:A22). The image is of the unfaithful wife sponging off her cuckolded husband.

But throwing the woman out may cause even more disorder: the *Washington Post* editorial page, having described Pakistan's nuclear weapons program—in an allusion to the ultimate symbol of Muslim femininity—as concealed "behind a veil of secrecy," goes on to warn that there are "advantages to . . . having Pakistan stay in a close and constraining security relationship with the United States rather than be cast out by an aid cutoff into a loneliness in which its passion could only grow" (1987:A22). Thus, even though American intelligence had by 1986 concluded that the Pakistani uranium-enrichment plant at Kahuta "had gone all the way" (Smith 1988:104), and even though the president can no longer, as he is required by law, "certify Pakistan's nuclear purity" (Molander 1986), the disobedient, emotive femininity of Pakistan is likely to be less disruptive if it is kept within the bounds of its uneasy relationship with the United States.

Third World nations are also often portrayed as children, and the United States, as a parental figure. The message is succinctly conveyed by one newspaper headline: "India, Pakistan Told to Put Weapons Away" (Marshall 1998a). Ben Sanders praises the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a means to "protect the atomically innocent" (1990:25). But what about when innocence is lost? Steve Chapman, speaking of India and Pakistan, argues that "it's fine to counsel teenagers against having sex. But once they have produced a baby, another approach is in order" (1998:21). *New York Times* editorials speak of U.S. "scoldings" of Pakistan and "U.S. demands for good Pakistani behavior from now on"

(1987a:A34). Some commentators fear that the U.S. parental style is too permissive and will encourage misbehavior by Pakistan's naughty siblings: "those who advocated an aid cutoff said the time had come for the United States to set an example for other would-be nuclear nations" (Smith 1988:106). Warning that American parental credibility is on the line, the *New York Times* says that "all manner of reason and arguments have been tried with Pakistani leaders. It's time for stronger steps" (1987a:A34).

These metaphorical representations of threshold nuclear nations as criminals, women, and children assimilate the relationship between the West and the Third World to other hierarchies of dominance within Western culture. They use the symbolic force of domestic hierarchies—police over criminals, men over women, and adults over children—to buttress and construct the global hierarchy of nations, telling us that, like women, children, and criminals, Third World nations have their proper place. The sense in the West that Third World nations have their proper place at the bottom of a global order in which nuclear weapons are the status symbols of the powerful alone—that nuclear proliferation is transgressing important symbolic hierarchies—is nicely conveyed by the condescending reactions in the Western media to India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests of 1998. Here many commentators sounded like secretaries of exclusive members-only clubs blackballing applications from the nouveau riche. "With scant regard for the admonitions of other members of the [nuclear] group, India has abruptly and loudly elbowed itself from the bottom into the top tier of this privileged elite," said one commentator (Smith 1998:A12). Putting the upstarts back in their place, U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright said that it was "clear that what the Indians and Pakistanis did was unacceptable and that they are not now members of the nuclear club" (Marshall 1998b:A12). The same sentiment was expressed in stronger terms on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* by former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, whose characterization of India draws on classic orientalist imagery to make its point that the Indians are not "our" kind of people: "We must make clear to the Indian government that it is today what it was two weeks ago, an arrogant, overreaching cabal that, by its devotion to the caste system, the political and economic disenfranchisement of its people and its religious intolerance, is unworthy of membership in any club" (1998:13). Mary McGrory, an alleged liberal, writing for the *Washington Post* op-ed page, expressed the same reaction against people rising above their proper station in life. In a comment extraordinary for its simple erasure of the great literary and cultural achievements made by persons of the Indian subcontinent over many centuries, she said, "People who cannot read, write or feed their children are forgetting these lamentable circumstances in the ghastly glory of being able to burn the planet or their enemies to a crisp" (1998b:C1).

### **Nuclear Colonialism and the Return of the Repressed**

Noam Chomsky (1982) has suggested that the arms race between the superpowers was not really "about" the U.S.–Soviet rivalry at all but was a convenient way to assure the subjugation of smaller countries in the Third World under

the guise of superpower competition. One does not have to swallow whole the simple reductionism of this argument to accept that there is obviously some connection between the nuclear stockpiles of some developed nations on the one hand and the political clientship and economic underdevelopment of Third World nations on the other. Just as some nations have abundant access to capital while others do not, so some nations are allowed plentiful supplies of the ultimate weapon while others are prevented by elaborate treaties and international police activities from obtaining it. Without devising rigidly deterministic models connecting economic power and nuclear weapons—models that such states as Japan and Germany obviously would not fit—one can at least sketch the broad contours of this generalization: the nuclear underdevelopment of the developing world is one fragment in a wider and systematic pattern of global disempowerment that ensures the subordination of the south.<sup>19</sup>

The discourse on nuclear proliferation legitimates this system of domination while presenting the interests the established nuclear powers have in maintaining their nuclear monopoly as if they were equally beneficial to all the nations of the globe. And, ironically, the discourse on nonproliferation presents these subordinate nations as the principal source of danger in the world. This is another case of blaming the victim.

The discourse on nuclear proliferation is structured around a rigid segregation of “their” problems from “ours.” In fact, however, we are linked to developing nations by a world system, and many of the problems that, we claim, render these nations ineligible to own nuclear weapons have a lot to do with the West and the system it dominates. For example, the regional conflict between India and Pakistan is, in part at least, a direct consequence of the divide-and-rule policies adopted by the British raj; and the dispute over Kashmir, identified by Western commentators as a possible flash point for nuclear war, has its origins not so much in ancient hatreds as in Britain’s decision in 1846 to install a Hindu maharajah as leader of a Muslim territory (Burns 1998). The hostility between Arabs and Israelis has been exacerbated by British, French, and American intervention in the Middle East dating back to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. More recently, as Steven Green points out, “Congress has voted over \$36.5 billion in economic and military aid to Israel, including rockets, planes, and other technology which has directly advanced Israel’s nuclear weapons capabilities. It is precisely this nuclear arsenal, which the U.S. Congress has been so instrumental in building up, that is driving the Arab state to attain countervailing strategic weapons of various kinds” (1990).

Finally, the precariousness of many Third World regimes is not at all unconnected with the activities of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the CIA, and various multinational corporations based in the West. And if U.S. sanctions against India and Pakistan after their 1998 tests destabilize these countries, Western commentators will doubtless point to this instability as a further reason why they cannot be trusted with the bomb. “Our” coresponsibility for “their” problems and the origin of some of those problems in a continuing system of global domination which benefits the West is an integral part of ordinary

political discourse in the Third World itself; it is, however, denied by an orientalist discourse that disavows that we and the Other are ultimately one.

### Conclusion

This article has critiqued policy talk grounded in an unsustainable binary opposition between nations that can be trusted with nuclear weapons and nations that cannot—an opposition that can be found in some antinuclear as well as establishment discourse in the West. I do not want to minimize the potential dangers of nuclear proliferation, which are, surely, clear enough. I do want to argue that these dangers, such as they are, should not be spoken about in terms that demean the peoples of the Third World. Nor should they be represented in ways that obscure both the dangers inherent in the continued maintenance of our own nuclear arsenals and the fact that our own actions are often a source of the instabilities we so fear in Third World nations.

So, where does this leave us? This article has set out to critique not a particular policy but the way our conversations about policy choices on the nuclear issue may unthinkingly incorporate certain neocolonial hierarchies and assumptions that, when drawn to our attention, many of us would disown. Nor is this just a matter of policing language, for the embedded orientalist assumptions I have been critiquing here underpin a global security regime that sanctifies a particular kind of Western military dominance in the world. Because I have set out to criticize a particular kind of policy talk rather than a specific policy, I will conclude not with a prescribed policy but by suggesting that there are three different discursive positions on proliferation, each pointing in the direction of a very different global security regime, that do not embody the double standard I have been concerned to criticize here. I call them “exclusion,” “participation,” and “renunciation.”

The strategy of exclusion is based pragmatically in the conventions of *realpolitik*. It involves the candid declaration that, while nuclear weapons may be no more dangerous in the hands of Muslims or Hindus than in those of Christians, they are a prerogative of power, and the powerful have no intention of allowing the powerless to acquire them. This is a position that, in its rejection of easy racism and phony moralism, is at least honorable in its frankness. It is the position of *New York Times* columnist Flora Lewis in her remark that “the ‘rights’ of nations are limited, and the limits must be imposed by those who can. They may not be more virtuous, but they must strive for it. That is the reason to keep insisting on nonproliferation” (1990:23).

The second position, participation, is based on Kenneth Waltz’s argument that all countries benefit from acquiring nuclear weapons. This position may have more appeal in certain parts of the Third World than in the West. It is the position of India, Israel, and Pakistan, for example, who have, like the older nuclear nations, sought to maximize their power and freedom by acquiring a nuclear capability. These countries pursued nuclear weapons in search of greater security vis-à-vis regional rivals and out of a desire to shift the balance of power in their client relationships with the superpowers.

The third strategy would be renunciation. This strategy breaks down the distinctions we have constructed between “us” and “them” and asks whether nuclear weapons are safe in anyone’s hands. “What-must-on-no-account-be-known,” says Salman Rushdie, is the “impossible verity that savagery could be concealed beneath decency’s well-pressed shirt” (1984:219). Our orientalist discourse on nuclear proliferation is one of our ways not to know this. By breaking down the discourse, confronting those parts of our own personality and culture which appear as the childish, irrational, lawless, or feminine aspects of the Other, we could address our doubts about ourselves instead of harping continually on our doubts about others. Then we might accept that “the fact that we urge other nations not to depend on nuclear weapons in this way—and urge very strenuously—suggests that we have mixed feelings about how safe they make us” (Ground Zero 1982:221). This acceptance would lead us to the same conclusion reached by George Kennan, former ambassador to the Soviet Union and the originator of the policy of containment in the Cold War:

I see the danger not in the number or quality of the weapons or in the intentions of those who hold them but in the very existence of weapons of this nature, regardless of whose hands they are in. I believe that unless we consent to recognize that the nuclear weapons we hold in our hands are as much a danger to us as those that repose in the hands of our supposed adversaries there will be no escape from the confusions and dilemmas to which such weapons have brought us, and must bring us increasingly as time goes on. For this reason, I see no solution to the problem other than the complete elimination of these and all other weapons of mass destruction from national arsenals; and the sooner we move toward that solution, and the greater courage we show in doing so, the safer we will be. [1981:62, quoted in Lichterman, Cabasso, and Burroughs 1995:22–23]

### Notes

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1. The presumption that nuclear weapons are most dangerous in the hands of ethnic others has also found its way into video game culture. The company Electronic Arts markets a video game called Nuclear Strike™ that “drops players into the jungles of Southeast Asia in a fight to stop a tyrant [Colonel LeMonde] who is holding the world hostage with a nuclear threat” (Business Wire 1997).

2. Reuters wire service, May 28, 1998.

3. In this article I treat the Western discourse about the established nuclear powers as a single unit for heuristic purposes, although the five official nuclear nations are not all treated exactly alike within the discourse. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in Hollywood films such as *The Peacemaker*, for example, Russia has increasingly been portrayed in the Western media in the alarmist terms formerly reserved for Third World nations (Cockburn and Cockburn 1997). China was perceived as what one would now call a “rogue state” when it first acquired nuclear weapons. These days its nuclear status is mostly ignored in the discourse on nuclear proliferation—as is Israel's. Israel occupies an interesting and structurally anomalous position. As an outpost in the Middle East of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it tends to be exempted from criticism even though, in formal terms, it has more in common with such threshold states as Pakistan and Iraq than with the official nuclear powers: it has adversaries at its border; it has ancient and passionate—at root religious—enmities with its neighbors; its command and control procedures over nuclear weapons are uncertain; and the power of the military within the nation is high by Western democratic standards.

4. I thank George Bunn and Gail Lapidus for pointing this out to me.

5. The START II Treaty cuts the strategic arsenals to 3,500 deployed weapons on each side—though many thousands more weapons will be retained in strategic reserves.

6. On the notion of dominant discourses, see especially Foucault 1980a, 1980b. See also Scott 1990, Terdiman 1985, and Williams 1977.

7. Classic sources on the theory and practice of deterrence include Brodie 1959; Jervis 1984; Kahn 1960; Schelling 1960, 1966; and Wohlstetter 1959. See Freedman 1981 and Morgan 1977 for overviews of this body of thought.

8. This figure was supplied by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in Washington, D.C., <http://www.tomco.net/~nlchp/>.

9. The leading proponents of the view that the Cold War was, in Gaddis's words, a “long peace” stabilized by nuclear deterrence are Gaddis (1982) and Mearsheimer (1990).

10. Here I focus on the argument that a common border is dangerous because it leads to very short missile flight times. One sometimes also sees the argument that deterrence between India and Pakistan will be unstable because, sharing a border, they are more likely to fight directly—for example, over Kashmir. However, China and the Soviet Union practiced stable deterrence across a shared border. Also, one could as easily argue that a common border enhances deterrence because there is less chance of escaping radioactive fallout if one uses nuclear weapons against a nearby enemy.

11. Unfortunately Pakistan has declared its intention to put warheads on the Ghauri missile, so this contrast between South Asia and the behavior of the principal nuclear powers may be in the process of disintegrating.

12. For a variant on this argument, see Perkovich 1993.

13. One reason given by defense intellectuals for not sharing such safety technologies with India and Pakistan is that it would signal U.S. acceptance of their nuclear weapons capability.

14. By contrast, George Perkovich has suggested that authoritarian regimes may actually find it easier to denuclearize than democracies. He points out that the governments of South Africa, Brazil, and Argentina actually decided to abandon their nuclear weapons programs before their transition to democracy (Perkovich 1998).

15. I am indebted to Avner Cohen and George Rathjens for pointing this out to me.

16. Dahl (1985), Falk (1982), and Scarry (1985) all argue that nuclear weapons have a corrosive effect on democracy, subverting it from within. Dahl argues that the secrecy and arcane expertise surrounding nuclear weapons decisions as they are currently made excludes the public from those decisions. Falk and Scarry argue that, because the use of nuclear weapons could be initiated by a small elite within U.S. society, the citizenry has lost its prerogative, central to liberal society, to consent to war.

17. It bears noting here that, despite the popular U.S. conception of Saddam Hussein as a madman, his conduct of the Gulf Crisis and eventual Gulf War was, by the standards of realpolitik, shrewd and rational, even if it was also ruthless and, ultimately, unsuccessful. In his conversation with U.S. Ambassador April Glasspie a few days before invading Kuwait, Hussein attempted to make sure he would not be trespassing on U.S. vital interests. In subsequent months Hussein attempted to buy time and split the coalition before the war. When that failed, his attacks on Israel were an intelligent (albeit amoral) strategy to split the Arab coalition. He was wise to keep his air force well away from the U.S. air force during the war. Finally, in surrendering and surviving as leader of his country, Hussein showed that he was not quite like Hitler after all (cf. Waltz 1995a:13, 1995b:97).

18. Hence William Safire's comment in the debate as to whether or not the United States should undertake air strikes on Iraq that President Clinton "cannot, as head of the only willing world police power, do less" (1998:A21).

19. Thus, for example, Eric Ehrmann, worried by evidence that Iraq, Brazil, and Argentina were working together on the bomb, fears that "with Latin-developed mass-destruction technologies in hand, Saddam's nonaligned populism could transcend the politics of Islam and shift the global balance of power" (1990:19). He fears a global alliance, protected by its own nuclear umbrella, between "Saddam Hussein's challenge to the oil sheikhdoms and the struggle of Latin populists against their traditional oligarchies" (1990:19).

Richard Perle wonders, "Would the U.S. have sent 100,000 troops within range of Iraqi nuclear missiles? With nuclear weapons Saddam would rule the gulf and control the world's supply of oil" (1990:A8). William Safire agrees: "Once he gets his Saddam bomb, no land force, no matter how powerful, would dare invade; and, as his Tammuz missile is perfected, he can impose nuclear blackmail on the superpowers" (1990a:19).

Gary Milhollin (1990) argues that, now that the Cold War is over, the main threat to "our" security comes from the Third World. He argues that COCOM, the institution established to prevent Eastern bloc countries from acquiring advanced Western technology during the Cold War, should be reformed to admit former Eastern bloc countries and prevent Third World countries from acquiring advanced, especially nuclear, technology.

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