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REVIEW ESSAYS

A QUESTION OF STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY

Robert L. Gallucci

Lodal, Jan. *The Price of Dominance: The New Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Challenge to American Leadership*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2001. 234pp. \$19.95
Quester, George H. *Nuclear Monopoly*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, Rutgers Univ., 2000. 234pp. \$44.95

Both books are about America's strategic nuclear weapons policy. Jan Lodal, author of *The Price of Dominance*, knows a lot about the subject from having helped make nuclear weapons policy in both the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations, and at the Pentagon during the Jimmy Carter administration. George Quester, author of *Nuclear Monopoly*, is also an expert, having written important books about nuclear strategy and nuclear proliferation for more than

Robert L. Gallucci became the dean of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in 1996, after completing twenty-one years of government service, serving since August 1994 with the Department of State as ambassador-at-large. In March 1998, the State Department announced his appointment as special envoy to deal with the threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. In July 1992, Dr. Gallucci was confirmed as the assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs. He earned his master's degree and doctorate in politics from Brandeis University. Dr. Gallucci is the author of a number of publications on political-military issues, including Neither Peace nor Honor: The Politics of American Military Policy in Vietnam (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975).

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three decades. Lodal analyzes the current U.S. strategic posture and, finding it wanting, advocates a change in policy. Quester analyzes that brief period in America's past when it was the only nation with nuclear weapons, and asks why U.S. policy was not then different from what it was, and what lessons might be learned for future policy. These are very different books, from authors with quite different experiences, but both speak to America's unique position of power in the world and what the United States might do with that power.

Lodal begins by identifying the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as the most immediate serious threat to the security of the United

States. He then asserts that “intense international cooperation” will be essential if the United States is to deal with that threat but that America’s overwhelming nuclear power and the current direction of policy undermine cooperation. Thus, the price of America’s strategic nuclear dominance will be increased vulnerability to chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in the hands of many states.

There is an assertion here of a direct link between the U.S. strategic nuclear weapons posture and its nonproliferation efforts; Lodal finds the strategic vision that should constructively connect the two to be absent or confused. Specifically, he sees recent U.S. policy as informed by a muddle of three visions: one that would require more of the same kind of negotiated arms control that the United States has been pursuing for decades; one that would replace arms control with a robust missile defense; and a third that would move the United States to the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction. The first he describes as stalled, caught in gridlock without the cooperation from other countries necessary if it is to succeed; the second he pronounces technically impossible to achieve; and the third he easily puts aside as politically implausible. The way then is clear for Lodal’s new strategic vision of deterrence and cooperation, the central features of which are a strategic force of a thousand nuclear weapons deployed aboard B-2 bombers and submarines, plus an additional two hundred weapons in Europe to maintain “coupling” with Nato, and a “thin” missile defense of one hundred interceptors, with deployments in space limited to sensors for warning and tracking.

This prescription follows from the view that America must avoid adopting a force posture with the combination of offensive strategic nuclear forces and a robust missile defense that would imply overwhelming dominance. Lodal notes that current strategic nuclear-strike plans call for the United States to maintain a capability to respond to the warning of an attack with the prompt launch of a counterstrike at an enemy’s forces to reduce the amount of damage suffered and to ensure that U.S. forces are used before they are destroyed. However, this requirement, he says, is a fiction because of the short time available to make such a decision to “launch on warning.” The capability to attack promptly and destroy an enemy’s forces is really a *preemptive* capability. Moreover, if present U.S. offensive forces are maintained or reduced to a level no lower than 2,500 weapons, and if even a “thin” missile defense is deployed, America would appear to have a first-strike capability—the ability to launch preemptively a disarming strike against any combination of enemies and deter retaliation by a combination of retained offense and deployed defense.

Before this begins to sound too appealing, we are reminded that the United States should not want this strategic dominance, because of what it would cost

in other nations' willingness to cooperate with American efforts to control WMD—the real threat to U.S. security. There are other benefits to Lodal's slimmed-down, purely deterrent strategic posture besides avoiding an alienating dominance. First, mutual de-alerting of offensive forces becomes possible, since all U.S. forces are survivable and have no prompt-response mission. Second, the thin defense would be available to cope with accidents, unintended launches, and irrational rogues, and to improve crisis stability by forcing an enemy to launch, or threaten to launch, a significant strategic attack if it sought to prevail by escalation or intimidation.

There is much to recommend Lodal's prescription but less reason to believe it will be embraced. While he is surely right about the emerging American first-strike capability if U.S. offensive forces are not drastically reduced as a national missile defense is deployed, there is no reason to believe that the Bush administration (or any other administration, for that matter) would assess the price of such dominance the way Lodal does or decide not to pay it. But Lodal's discussion of this central argument is the best part of the book. It is stronger than his brief treatment of the complex issues of regional WMD proliferation, and it deserves careful reading and serious discussion.

Quester's critique of U.S. nuclear policy addresses the period beginning in 1945, when the United States built its first nuclear weapons, and ending in 1949, when it was sure the Soviet Union had done the same. The author finds it fascinating that a nation that had just emerged from a world war with a monopoly (which it could be sure would not last long) on nuclear weapons did not do something to keep its advantage and thus avoid a foreseeable eternity of vulnerability and dependence on deterrence.

The reader, of course, initially may not find the point nearly as fascinating as Quester, believing instead that launching a nuclear attack against the Soviet Union's nascent nuclear facilities and cities—that is, “using” its monopoly to start a preventive war—was and is unthinkable in terms of American values. It is precisely this attitude that troubles Quester. He argues at length that a number of important thinkers in the United States and Britain considered “using” the monopoly and that U.S. explanations for why Washington did not try harder to preserve its position of dominance are not all that persuasive. As the author puts it, this book is “all about” the idea of “imposing rather than proposing the Baruch Plan.”

As it turns out, whether one finds the essential question as compelling a paradox as the author does is less important than the analysis and argument of the case with all its variations. It is unfortunate, though, that with all the creative rigor Quester brings to his discourse, he is not more careful to distinguish between the case for attempting compellence, intimidation, or just more assertive

diplomacy predicated on a military posture of nuclear monopoly, on the one hand, and the actual launch of a nuclear strike in a preventive war, on the other. Too often the many uses of America's nuclear monopoly are lumped together, when clearly some are much more "thinkable" than others.

In sum, both these books should be read by strategists, military professionals, and concerned citizens, because each speaks to the question of American nuclear dominance and how it ought to be used in the broader national interest. Lodal's book is clearly more sharply focused on current policy prescription, and it is easier to find in this work propositions to embrace as well as those with which to take issue. Quester's book is a more enjoyable read, however, providing at least as much to argue over, particularly for those who thrive on counterfactual propositions.