
Reviewed by Bill Gollan

The economic, social and political crisis that has engulfed the world has its sharpest and most dangerous expression in the Cold War, the arms race, and the system of military-political blocs. These phenomena are qualitatively different from other aspects of the crisis; they occur not from failures of the productive-distributive system but from conscious political decisions taken by governments.

Given the political will, they can be checked and reversed in the same way. But with the USA and the USSR inextricably involved in the arms race and the bloc system on spurious grounds of “defence”, the political will can be created only through the pressure of a popular disarmament movement of unprecedented dimensions.

In the next two decades, with the expansion of the nuclear economy and its link with nuclear weaponry, the best informed forecast is that the nuclear weapons’ club will have increased from five to eighteen, including such trigger-happy governments as those of Israel and South Africa, which may already have nuclear weapons, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, etc.

As the bloc system assumes a global pattern, no nation anywhere is immune from the danger of nuclear attack. Australia has placed itself in the front line of danger by its bi-partisan alignment with US global policy.

It is facing and analysing this situation that Jim Falk’s book is of particular value. As a theoretical physicist, historian and peace activist he is exceptionally qualified for the task.

Punctiliously researched and thoroughly documented, this book is written in a direct and lively style, the scientific explanations being readily comprehensible to the lay person.

In his analysis of the background to preparations for nuclear war, Jim Falk traces the development in nuclear-weapon strategies from Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and the balance of terror, to the new level of danger involved in the more accurate missiles and the doctrines of “first strike”, “theatre war” and “winnable” nuclear war.

The militarisation of the world involved in the expansion of nuclear arms on the ground, in the air and under the sea is intensified by the export of armaments by the major powers to the smaller developed nations and the third world, rapidly converting the earth and space into an arsenal.

Simultaneously, attempts at control of armaments by the major powers have failed as each power projects plans to meet its own “security” needs, and expands its military and political control over regions considered vital to its interests.

The author makes the point that it is of no importance to engage in a debate on the degree of responsibility to be attached to one or other of the major powers for the crisis. It is part of history that the USA initiated the arms race by using its exclusive possession of the atom bomb as a political weapon and quite openly developed the hydrogen bomb for the same purpose.

What is critical now is that, while each concedes that nuclear weapons provide no defence because of the retaliatory power of the other, both continue to develop and expand nuclear arms capacity at ever-increasing velocity.

In Jim Falk’s words:

Together the weapons and strategies are moving in a direction in which their role in deterring war is being
outstripped by a new capability and a new form of planning. Increasingly the new nuclear arsenals are being oriented not to deterring nuclear wars but to fighting them.

Over half the book is concerned with Australia's place in the global network, the suicidal policy it is following as a satellite of the USA, and proposals for policy changes which could have a positive effect on world politics and enhance Australia's security.

In this respect Jim Falk asserts:

There is one central theme that runs through this book. It is that in this rapidly changing world old assumptions, old policies and old reactions, even if they were effective in the past, no longer add to Australia's security.

Based on this concept, a penetrating analysis is made of Australian foreign and defence policies. The bi-partisan dependence on "great and powerful friends", totally irrelevant even lethally dangerous when it becomes a partisan involvement in US global policy, is subjected to devastating criticism.

In particular, the writer disparages the myth that Australia can depend on the US for assistance in time of need or that such assistance is guaranteed by the ANZUS pact. In the era of nuclear weapons, every nation in the event of a nuclear war would be in a desperate position and its only concern would be to ensure its own survival.

On the issue of defence of the Australian homeland, given that the US alliance is irrelevant, Jim Falk makes some interesting comparisons with small European countries such as Sweden, Austria and Switzerland, with emphasis on civil defence and mobilisation of the whole community in time of need.

The book ends with an examination of the critical nature of the uranium debate in Australian politics and the possibility of the withdrawal of Australia from the "nuclear connection", so providing a "third voice".

"Third voices", unhindered by alignment (to either of the superpowers) have the potential to put pressure on them and adjust the political constraints within which they manoeuvre. Together with other non-aligned nations, through support offered to or withdrawn from either superpower as necessary, we can assist in providing the counterweight that will draw them away from the next stage of the nuclear arms spiral.

On the wider question of changing the direction of world politics away from preparations for nuclear war, the author points to the need for broadening the decision-making process and for decentralisation of political power and control.

Says Jim Falk:

By encouraging an obsessive fear of the other bloc, by pointing to the global reach of the other's influence each superpower is able to bend its allies to its policies, and justify to its own population intervention in the affairs of any country. It is only by refusing to accept the present division of the world between blocs or between peoples that we can mould a secure future.

"Taking Australia off the Map" contains extensive illustrations, diagrams, statistics, factual appendices and a list of national and state peace and disarmament organisations and nuclear energy and anti-uranium-mining groups, with addresses and telephone numbers.

Jim Falk has written a book of immense value to the peace and disarmament movement, both nationally and internationally.

Bill Gollan Is a former headmaster and long time peace activist.