

Wisconsin

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SPREADING THE WORD AGAINST SPREADING THE BOMB

By DAVID TENENBAUM

THREE blocks northwest of the White House, a bronze statue of Union Adm. David Farragut stands vigil against Confederate artillery. Half a block farther north, a University of Wisconsin-Madison law professor stands vigil against a more modern and sinister threat: the spread of nuclear weapons.

From a humble start in 1986, Gary Milhollin — director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control — has become one of the world's influential experts on the proliferation of the archetypal weapon of the 20th century.

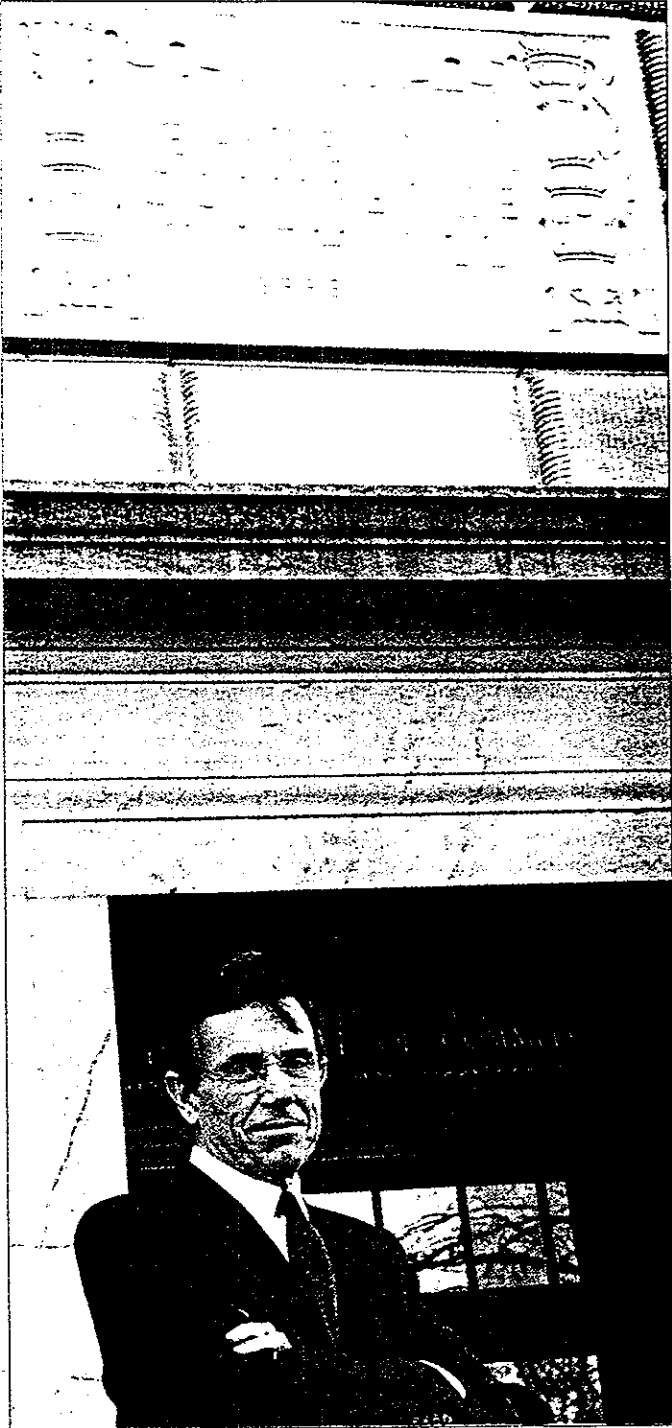
Milhollin keeps Wisconsin in the name of his project because he's proud of his continuing professorship at the UW, but his influence is felt far beyond the Badger state.

When The New York Times wanted to explain who helped Iraq develop its nuclear weapons, for instance, Milhollin wrote an article concluding that the international control of nuclear weapons "will fail its first important test" unless United Nations inspectors get far more aggressive and suspicious. Whenever CBS or NBC seeks an informed reaction to North Korea's refusal to allow inspectors inside its nuclear plants, they ask Milhollin to serve as a "talking head." When any of the networks want to verify the accuracy of something they've learned about the arms trade, they ring Milhollin.

"I have called him for information as often as three times a week," says CBS Pentagon correspondent Jim Stewart. "He's reliable and accurate. I ... have checked him out."

UW professor has become a key voice in the fight to halt nuclear proliferation

Continued



Gary Milhollin, at the US Commerce Department. There's an irony to its motto, he warns: Commerce with all does not always promote peace.

While many people have been obsessed with the nuclear rivalry between the superpowers, Milhollin has focused on nations that want to join the so-called nuclear club, proliferators like Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

"In the proliferation area, he almost stands by himself," says David Kay, who directed three UN inspections of Iraq's nuclear industry after the 1991 Gulf War. Kay, a senior defense analyst for Science Applications International Corp. in Virginia, refers both to Milhollin's expertise and his early attention to the subject.

While Union naval commander Farragut used a spyglass to track 19th-century weapons, Milhollin uses modern tricks to monitor the 20th-century menace. He starts with his encyclopedic knowledge of the arms business, then checks computerized databases and obscure publications, and phones the contacts he lists in three large Rolodexes.

Milhollin brings another asset to his work. The 55-year-old professor is a gifted communicator. He can handle television's demand for sound bites and in early December demonstrated his ability to reduce thoughtful positions to these 10- and 15-second morsels.

When an NBC News crew asked if it was worth risking war to force North Korea's hand in the dispute over inspection of its nuclear facilities, Milhollin got right to business.

"The international system of inspection is on the line, and we're supposed to go to the [UN] Security Council, and we should," he said. "We're coming to the end of the line. The North Koreans are not moving, and we have reached the end of the road diplomatically."

When the correspondent asked what was at stake, Milhollin responded without a wasted word: "If North Korea gets the bomb, South Korea will get the bomb. Then Japan will get the bomb, and suddenly you have millions of people threatened with nuclear weapons who aren't threatened today."

Within weeks, the Central Intelligence Agency concluded that North Korea indeed had built one or two nuclear weapons.

A dapper, fine-featured man whose brown hair shows no trace of gray, Milhollin knows that he lives or dies by his relations with the media. Washington think tanks grind out dull reports about the weapons trade, only to gather dust, he points out. But he has found that politicians have greater difficulty ignoring what's on the evening news or in newspapers that circulate around the world.

These laser-guided sound bites, and the information to back them up, have made Milhollin one of the world's most authoritative voices on proliferation.

"I probably don't know anyone in Washington — outside the US government — more knowledgeable on nuclear issues, says Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network's White House correspondent and its former Pentagon correspondent. "He speaks with credibility."

A HALF-CENTURY after the first nuclear bomb exploded in the New Mexico desert, lots of work remains for crusaders against nuclear proliferation.

The old "Nuclear Club" — the United States, the Soviet Union, China, France and Britain — has been joined, at least temporarily, by three fragments of the former Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Belarus and the Ukraine. And Israel, India and Pakistan are widely suspected of having ready-to-assemble nukes on the shelf. Then there's that legion of nuclear-wannabe's: North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

A fateful date, as far as nuclear proliferation is concerned, is fast approaching. In 1995, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will expire unless the many dozens of signatories agree upon a renewal. The 1970 treaty is the backbone of international efforts to control the spread of nuclear weapons, and events between now and 1995 will influence how many countries continue to concede their "right" to possess these weapons.

Although nuclear weapons are easy to hate, the Pentagon and the think tanks it contracts with have long considered them a cheap form of deterrence. But it's hard to find anybody — at least in the US or Europe — who wants nations with aggressive histories such as Libya, Iran or North Korea to join the nuclear club.

When the Soviet Union came apart in the late 1980s, experts on the superpower rivalry found themselves without a problem to solve. But Milhollin, who had focused on the Third-World proliferation issue since 1985, found himself much in demand.

When he began, Milhollin seemed a mere Don Quixote tilting against the efforts of Pakistan, India, Israel, South Africa and Iraq to build nuclear weapons. But his Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control has played an important role in changing the course of nuclear history. His first major success focused on Norwegian heavy water — a rare form of water used to make weapons-grade plutonium

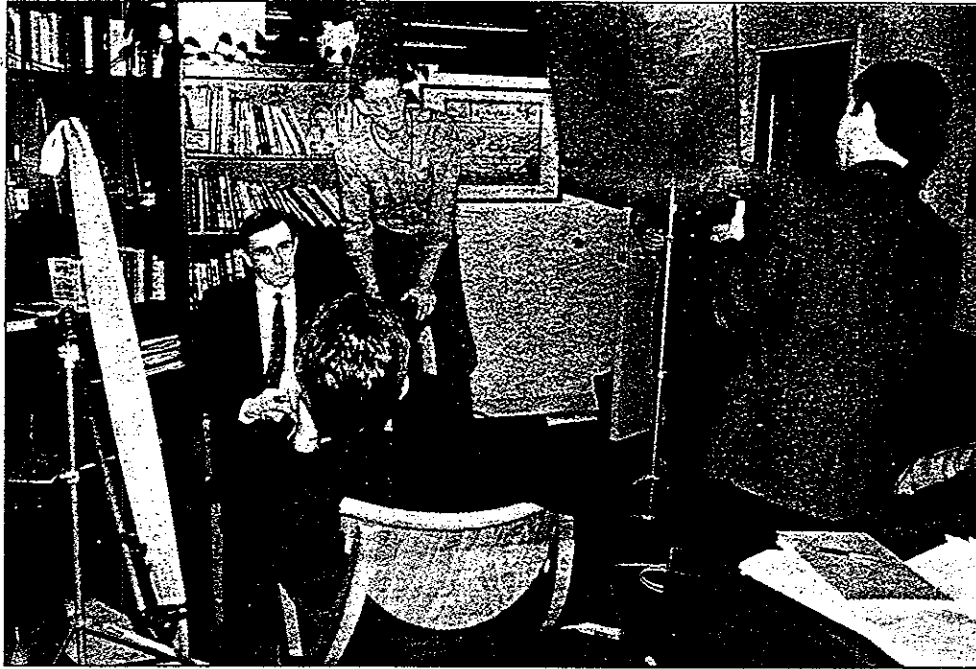


Photo by DAVID TENENBAUM

Milhollin (sitting, facing camera) was interviewed by the BBC in early December. He has become one of the world's ranking authorities on nuclear proliferation.

in relatively simple reactors. The water slows down the neutrons in the reactor.

In 1986, Milhollin learned that Norway had sold 20 tons of heavy water to Israel in 1959. Partly because he had specialized in contract law at UW Law School, he wondered about terms of the sales contract. The Norwegian government told him that Israel was obligated to use the water for peaceful purposes, and that Norway could inspect how the water was to be used, although it had never done so. Armed with this information, Milhollin initiated a four-year media campaign to persuade Norway to carry out the inspections.

(He and others are convinced that Israel used the heavy water to make plutonium, and that Israel possesses nuclear weapons.)

"I made a fairly outrageous statement in the Norwegian media," Milhollin says, "that Norway could stop the Israeli bomb program by just picking up the telephone."

His campaign reached a climax when he helped a Norwegian TV station produce a documentary on the issue. Less than three weeks later, the Norwegian government halted sales of the crucial material to other countries.

In April 1990, Israel returned most of the heavy water rather than permit the inspection.

The experience taught Milhollin that "one person can force two governments to negotiate, if you work through the media. If you dig up something new, the media are really interested, and people react."

THE EFFECTS of Milhollin's work have been felt in Wisconsin and the Midwest. In 1990, his project learned

that the US Commerce Department was ready to approve supercomputer sales by IBM and Cray Research of Minneapolis and Chippewa Falls, Wis., to Brazil, India and Israel.

Concerned that the purchasing institutions were developing nuclear weapons and missiles, Milhollin returned to the media and helped pressure the US government to delay the approvals. The sales never went through.

The last three years Milhollin has spent a good deal of time examining Iraq's nuclear program. He had warned just before Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait that Iraq was trying to build nuclear bombs. In 1992, he charged that Iraq still was trying to build bombs. Then, in the February 1993 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, he amplified that allegation - and criticized the sluggishness of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN nuclear-inspection agency. UN inspectors, he wrote, "are being thwarted by their own management as well as by Saddam Hussein."

Iraq was a dismal chapter in the international control of nuclear weapons, Milhollin contends. Defeat, he says, was snatched from the jaws of victory. If the UN inspectors are being deceived by a country that agreed to highly intrusive inspections after it was flattened by an air war, then major changes are needed in the structure and mission of the international agency, he says.

(Now, as Iraq seems poised to renew oil exports, Milhollin is watching to see whether effective nuclear safeguards will be implemented in return for easing the UN embargo.)

The experience with Iraq also illustrated the



Photo by DAVID TENENBAUM

A television crew's light reflector puts Milhollin in the media spotlight he seeks.

importance of high-tech exports to nuclear-bomb programs. Iraq, in its nearly successful program, imported billions of dollars worth of machinery and supplies from Germany, the United States and elsewhere.

Yet Milhollin says that politicians have amnesia. "The lesson of Iraq is that if you arm somebody and give somebody the means to make nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, you might have to go to war with that person. But we seem to be making the same mistake. We're getting rid of export controls, and are still arming the world."

Milhollin charges that the Clinton administration gives only lip service to proliferation.

"The Clinton administration talks the loudest about proliferation, and has accomplished the least of any administration since I've been working on this issue," he says.

The Pentagon's natural desire for strict controls is countered by the US Commerce Department, which issues export licenses and where, Milhollin alleges, the attitude is "see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil."

Why does he have such an obsession, if that's the right word, with export controls?

Simply because nuclear weapons are hard to make but easy to hide, he explains. He sums it up like this: "In the world of non-proliferation, a gram of prevention is worth a megaton of cure."

The future owners of nuclear bombs may not rely on the traditional Cold War delivery systems: missiles, submarines or bombers. Instead, he suggests, they will opt for rental trucks, which are cheaper, more accurate and much harder to trace than inter-continental ballistic missiles.

And how could such a truck be used?

"If you had to predict where a Third-World bomb maker would put a bomb, if he wanted to hurt the United States, I can probably see that place from my window," Milhollin says. One mile south stands the Washington Monument. Hidden from view, and a few blocks closer, is the White House.

Although Milhollin acknowledges that his work at best only can slow the spread of nuclear weapons, he considers that a worthy goal in its own right.

"We must make it as difficult, expensive and time-consuming as possible . . . to make nuclear weapons and missiles," he says.

With enough time, he hopes that diplomacy and politics can ease the underlying tensions that cause nations to covet bombs in the first place. This is no abstract hope, Milhollin points out. He cites examples: The rapprochement between Brazil and Argentina slowed both countries' once-ambitious nuclear programs; South Africa renounced its nuclear ambitions during the abolition of apartheid; and the US and Russia have agreed to destroy large portions of their nuclear arsenals.

The superpower reductions give him some credibility when he proselytizes against nukes.

"We're slowly getting rid of these weapons, and that improves our moral position," he says. "When we talk to the developing world, we can plausibly say we're de-nuclearizing."

MILHOLLIN was born in 1938 and raised in Albany, Ind., a farm town "so small that you knew all the dogs by name." He had a younger brother and a younger sister and remembers a "typical 1950s childhood: black Keds sneakers and a

crew cut."

Shortly after American atomic bombs obliterated Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Milhollin celebrated the end of World War II by firing a shotgun in the air. Although the proof that nuclear reactions could produce incomprehensible explosions revolutionized international relations, the bombs were not an obvious part of his childhood. Unlike millions of Americans in the tense Cold War years of the 1950s, he did not hear the howl of air-raided sirens. There were none in Albany.

Perhaps because his father was an engineer, Milhollin got a mechanical engineering degree from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. But he lost interest in engineering and put himself through Catholic University of America School of Law, in Washington. After graduation in 1965, he spent a year working in Lyndon Johnson's poverty program, at the Office of Economic Opportunity in its New York and Boston offices. Already he was showing the kind of sensibility that later would propel him to become a public-interest lawyer with a nuclear casebook. "I once had a girlfriend who said I'd never have any money because I didn't care about money," he remembers.

Indeed, he lives in Bethesda, Md., a suburb of Washington, on his university salary. (Although he does not teach, he doesn't cost the UW anything, either. All of his funding reaches the university through the donations he attracts.) His wife, Monique, a French citizen, directs the French-language program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Milhollin began teaching law at Catholic University in 1971, but in 1975 — feeling "frustrated with academia" and wanting a "practical outlet" — he asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission if it could use his engineering knowledge and legal skill. The NRC's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel hired him as a part-time administrative judge and he presided over one of the start-up hearings for the undamaged reactor at the Three Mile Island plant in Pennsylvania — site of the nation's worst nuclear accident.

HIS LINK with Madison dates to 1976, when Frank Tuerkheimer, a UW-Madison law professor on leave to work for the Watergate Special Prosecution Task Force, suggested that he visit UW-Madison. He did just that, and liked what he saw, concluding that Madison would be a good place to raise his children. (Elliott, now 23, plans to enter law school this year. Jessica, 19, is a sophomore at Harvard University).

In Madison from 1976 to '85, Milhollin taught contract law and a seminar on nuclear-arms proliferation. He remembers the city as an idyllic refuge from his life in fast-paced Washington. He lived in the Vilas Park neighborhood, bicycled to his office, and didn't

even wear a tie. Teaching, he says, served as an ideal background for his future occupation as a nuclear watchdog: "It's good experience for working in front of the media, because you have to present a difficult, complicated subject in a clear way."

In 1985, he undertook a special project for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, studying India's heavy-water supplies. When he found that India's figures did not add up, the press took notice, and that whetted his appetite for nuclear sleuthing. As he moved on to the Norwegian heavy-water issue, he brought his family to Washington, where he became, as he puts it, a full-time nuclear-policy wonk.

Tuerkheimer, the UW-Madison law professor, says his friend is motivated by "a very strong sense of outrage, and in order for him to function he's got to be able to do something about things that outrage him."

Milhollin decided to call his effort the "Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control" because he identifies himself as an academic. "I'm not an activist; I'm a researcher," he says. But the project's name can be confusing. Says Pentagon correspondent Jim Stewart: "Senior producers and management at CBS News wanted to know why the hell they should care about a Wisconsin Project, and I had to tell them that the name doesn't mean anything. The guy knows his stuff."

As Milhollin continued appearing — as a source and author — in some of the world's leading publications and networks, the foundations supporting him began cracking their wallets a bit wider. (The project's 1993-'94 budget — roughly \$500,000 — comes from the Rockefeller and W. Alton Jones Foundations, and the Carnegie Corp., among others.)

ALTHOUGH Milhollin looks back fondly on Madison, and says his children "still think of that house on Jefferson St. as home," it's doubtful that, with the issue of nuclear proliferation heating up, he'll return to teaching law in Madison any time soon.

Milhollin plans to keep his office on K St., in the heart of Washington. Among the occupants of K St. are people paid to promote exports. "If you look out the window," Milhollin says, "you see lots of windows of lobbyists and lawyers who are representing American industry, and who are trying to push exports out the door. This is also true in London, Paris and Berlin, and there needs to be somebody on the other side, pushing back."

When Milhollin feels reason to push back, he prefers doing so in publications read at the highest levels, like *Foreign Policy* magazine, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

His March 1992 article in *The New York Times Magazine* drew on UN documents to specify the contributions of various suppliers to the Iraqi bomb effort. The detonators and the high-explosive, he concluded, were "made with help from:

United States Departments of Energy and Defense." He also listed help from companies in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Brazil.

One of the tangible results of Milhollin's work was Germany's decision to clamp down on its extensive nuclear- and chemical-weapons exports. Milhollin has long charged that German businesses played key roles in Iraq's nuclear program and Libya's chemical-weapons factories.

The Milhollin technique is to avoid general assertions, preferring to name corporate names. He knows that many corporate executives wince at being publicly linked to the nuclear machine of Saddam Hussein. Milhollin says chief executives sometimes visit his project, seeking to keep their companies out of his upcoming lists. "CEOs don't like to see their companies' integrity impugned," he says. His answer is simple: Quit selling the questionable merchandise.

Clearly, he's a crusader with a formidable goal. Yet unlike the stereotypical crusader, he is gracious, considerate and personable. Diana Edensword, his staff's Iraq expert, describes him as a "very reasonable man, very easy to work for."

Jerold White, senior employe of his five-member staff, cites a luncheon with German export officials, to push for tighter controls on suspicious exports. The Germans, White says, were worried that the meeting might dissolve into polemics. They wondered if Milhollin "would be rabid. [and] hit them over the head with their history?"

That didn't happen. "They soon realized he's not a one-note piano, he has perspective," White says. "He's not a fanatic."

In fact, Milhollin often laughs about the irony of his quest. "Nothing," he says, "is worse than a humorless wonk or do-gooder."

HOW MANY concrete changes have resulted from Milhollin's eight-year crusade against the bomb?

Tuerkheimer says: "There is nuclear proliferation that is not in the world because of Gary's technology that has not been sold. Because of Gary, the world is a safer place."

But Milhollin has met the inevitable disappointments that all crusaders must face. What keeps him going? His sense of outrage helps, as does his sense of humor. And then there's his lawyer habit of focusing on feasible alternatives while ignoring both doomsday and pie-in-the-sky attitudes.

"You have to do the best you can," he says, "even though there's no guarantee of success, because the alternative is to do nothing, and be sure to fail, and failure is not really acceptable."

"If everybody has the bomb, that means the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and the PLC [Palestine Liberation Organization] have the bomb. And the folks who blew up the New York World Trade Center would have the bomb.

"At that point, urban civilization becomes a question mark."

David Tenenbaum lives in Madison and writes on medicine health and the environment.