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Proposal of Nuclear Umbrella Could Place U.S. in Dilemma

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The talk in London of creating a sort of nuclear umbrella over that part of the world east of Suez is running far ahead of the facts in Washington.

In the end the idea may come to something but as of now the Johnson Administration has done no more than promise to look at the idea.

It all started here with President Johnson's Oct. 18 statement, after the first Chinese nuclear explosion, that "the nations that do not seek national nuclear weapons can be sure that if they need our strong support against some threat of nuclear blackmail, they will have it."

India's Prime Minister Shastri, picked up the idea. His nation has as much to fear as any from a nuclear-armed Red China and it has an incipient demand at home to go into the nuclear weapons business for self-protection. He asked British Prime Minister Wilson to take it up with Mr. Johnson.

Wilson did that when he was here earlier this month. The President told Wilson that he has set up a new committee, headed by former Deputy Defense Secretary Roswell Gilpatric, to consider the prob-

lem of how to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

The idea of any guarantee, as an outgrowth of the Johnson statement, is now before that committee. Shastri's proposal was that the U.S., Britain and the Soviet Union might get together on some sort of world-wide guarantee to protect the non-nuclear nations.

Wilson went back home and began to enlarge on the idea, in part — as seen from Washington — as a means of solving one of his own problems. Wilson's Defense Minister, Denis Healey, said in the House of Commons that such guarantees "must be the major priority in our negotiations with the Soviet Union" in the months ahead.

Healey also said that Britain would hold back some of its V-bombers, a plane with either a conventional or nuclear delivery capacity, from the proposed Atlantic nuclear force to use instead east of Suez.

The implication was that such bombers could be used along with American planes to form a new nuclear force in Asia, or even in the Middle East or elsewhere, to provide the proposed nuclear umbrella.

Officials here, however, say

all this talk is far ahead of the facts. They know that any such guarantees probably would mean a new treaty, and that would require Senate approval.

Furthermore, such a move would amount to a sweeping American guarantee to practically every nation in the world except the five now making nuclear weapons. That would be true whether or not the Soviet Union joined in, a move considered most unlikely at any rate.

President Johnson's mood, despite his generalized statement of Oct. 18, is hardly one of increasing American commitments around the world. He has enough problems with current commitments.

On the other hand, Mr. Johnson wants very much to do something to prevent other nations from getting into the nuclear weapons business. Hence the caveat that some new arrangement is not totally impossible.

At any rate, the Administration now is awaiting the Gilpatric study, due early next year. Top men from the key Government departments as well as outside experts and former Government officials are at work on the study.