

# *Undermining Proliferation: Nuclear Winter and Nuclear Renunciation*

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## Abstract

This paper maintains that it can never unequivocally be in the interest of a nuclear power to carry out a retaliatory deterrent threat against a nuclear-armed opponent, let alone even a highly “successful” (disarming) first nuclear strike. Its point of departure is the new research and modeling work being done in the United States on nuclear winter which demonstrates that even a “small” (100 warheads) regional nuclear war, such as between Pakistan and India and involving so-called “city exchanges”, would generate stratospheric soot sufficient to block enough sunlight to shut down a large fraction of the world’s agriculture for at least several years by drastic hemispheric and global cooling, with up to a billion starvation deaths to follow in the Third World and beyond. A massive nuclear exchange between big powers would entirely eliminate agricultural growing seasons for more than a decade and entail death on the scale of a medieval plague, at least--and possibly the end of a humanity of nations, quite apart from the well known catastrophic effects of blast, firestorm, fallout and long-term radiation.

The paper proceeds to argue that case for nuclear non-use in any circumstances is overwhelming: Even if the source of a nuclear attack is clearly identifiable, the attack may be unauthorised, accidental, psychotically inspired, or the result of technical malfunction or faulty warning systems. Any such attack may promptly or ultimately be disowned. A nuclear response, as opposed to a policy of wait and see, will be inappropriate from the viewpoint of sparing populations and the integrity of the planet as well as the national interest (while it exists) of the victim/potential responder. Indefinite wait-and-see becomes a strategy of *unconditional nuclear withholding*.

Together with checking further weapon proliferation, a life and death imperative of the nuclear age is to ensure that the ability to withhold nuclear use under and after nuclear attack is always available to *les grandes responsables* (both civilian and military) in the nuclear fraternity. We know, however, that *les grands deux* of the Cold and Post Cold War periods are not only over-armed, over-alert and doctrinally primed to fling thousands of megatons at each other on almost a moment’s notice, but have entrenched routines of nuclear command and control virtually designed to deny a serious withholding option to civilian leaders. In its obsession with deterrence and a supposedly “delicate” (!) balance of terror mainstream strategic analysis has helped legitimate a hair-trigger strategic posture. If so-called “existential deterrence”—fear of losing one or a few big cities—is largely responsible for keeping the nuclear peace, such as it is, the first priority for strategic theorists and policy makers must be to ensure a usable nuclear withholding option and explore in serious depth the case for exercising it.

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*"I'm an optimist. I have every confidence that global warming will be nullified by nuclear winter."*

### A Note on the Author /Acknowledgements

Peter King is a Research Associate in Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney and a former Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. He has held professorial appointments at the University of Papua New Guinea, Tokyo University and the University of Wollongong. He has been engaged in fitful attempts to prick the pretensions and pretences of strategic studies since *The Strategy of Total Withholding* (1971).

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Diseased Nature oftentimes breaks forth  
In strange eruptions.

*King Henry IV. Part I. Act iii. Sc. 1.*

How use doth breed a habit in a man!

*The Two Gentleman of Verona. Act v. Sc. 4.*

And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,  
And captive good attending captain ill.

*Sonnet lxvi.*

## Deterrence Theory: the Self and the Other

A mighty edifice of theory has been erected on the supposed foundational truth of nuclear strategy as classically adumbrated in the 1950s—that the way to persuade a supposed and nuclear-armed Enemy not to attack you is to “maximise deterrence” of him where

*One's Deterrence of the Other = One's Capability x One's Intentions*

That is, I must not only have a Big Bang for wreaking Your Destruction, but I must have also a Big Determination (or Resolve) to use it. Thus I should (ideally, for a big power facing a big power) have overwhelming capability—hundreds of long range nuclear missiles and thousands of nuclear bombs and warheads, and I must display the strongest determination to retaliate promptly and massively if attacked—in use doctrine, readiness arrangements, leadership mentality and speechifying, strategic theorising, et cetera.

This was far from being any kind of rationalisation of strategic experience in the war which ended in 1945. Therein lay a quite other set of lessons. In the new-fangled strategic theory of airpower as applied in World War II, rendering to rubble the cities of one's opponent was supposed to deter him from continuing to fight or fatally weaken his ability to do so. However the airborne atrocities of city bombing which began soon after 1939 had neither effect. Although the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs were supposed to have shortened the war, that was *post hoc* justification. Revenge seemed to be uppermost in President Truman's mind, and it is clear in retrospect that the war-shortening effect of the US nuclear onslaught against Japan on 6th and 9th August 1945 was considerably less than Stalin's declaration of war against the Showa Emperor on August 8th, which seemed to portend a Soviet occupation of Japan itself.<sup>1</sup>

An orgy of rationalisation followed in which the strategically redundant and morally outrageous nuclear bombing of Japan was vindicated and also, by illogical extension, the threat and reality of nuclear holocaust. It was only a short step to the conclusion that strategic stability rests on madness—more colourfully, MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) ness: willingness to participate in mutual genocide.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray Sayle, 'Letter from Hiroshima: "Did the Bomb End the War?"' *The New Yorker*, July 31, 1995, p. 40. In any case American fire-bombing had actually destroyed much more than half of Japan's targetable industrial cities before August 1945 and *that* had not given pause to its leaders.

As Lawrence Freedman has shown in his book of nuclear reflections towards the end of the Cold War, strategic theory steadily ossified from the heady days in America when, from the mid-1950s and especially in the early 1960s under John F Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, a privileged and half closeted strategic intelligentsia brought the tablets of strategic law down from the RAND Corporation, the Air Force think tank, in California to Washington, from whence they hypnotised the world.

Actually there were always two doctrines in contention. The first was the immediate post-Hiroshima doctrine of Minimum Deterrence: it is only necessary to have and use a simple "counter-city" or "counter-value" retaliatory arsenal (maybe weapons numbered in the tens rather than the hundreds) and able to destroy a sufficiency of lives and property on the other side in case of attack and therefore to uphold deterrence. The other doctrine—let us call it Maximum Deterrence—evolved from what the sophisticates at RAND thought they had discovered in the fifties after the Soviet Union got the Bomb in 1949: that the Minimum Deterrence idea was simplistic and utterly inadequate.

To begin with you might need to attack the enemy first—if he was committing aggression against an ally, for instance, and your conventional ground forces were inadequate. Or if you noticed him mobilising for nuclear attack you might want to get in your own attack before he did ("pre-emption"). In that case you would need to be able to "go counterforce"—to destroy, paralyse or decimate his nuclear arsenal in a first strike. This would be excellent if you could do it while avoiding perdition yourself, whereas destroying his cities would merely topple him as a power-political rival without ensuring your own next breath. While fighting you also may need to have weapons to "withhold" against cities in case he does too. By destroying his cities first, you merely "guarantee" that your own will be destroyed.

Of course the requirements for running a counterforce as opposed to a countercity arms race were enormous. You not only needed big weapon numbers to survive a surprise attack and play the counterforce exchange game, but you would also need eventually to make them invulnerable by "hardening" (missile silos with concrete), airborne alerts (for bombers) and missile mobility (by land, sea and air), not to mention civil defence to discourage the citizen survivors from envying the dead. You also needed to be trigger happy or you might be caught with your pants, planes or missiles down and your submarines up, and be unable to preempt the aggressor—who by definition was never you, of course.

And so an arms race involving thousands of strategic missiles and bombers, hundreds of missile-firing submarines and tens of thousands of nuclear (including thermonuclear) bombs and warheads was born between the Big Two. Later it spawned a complementary tactical or theatre nuclear missile race in Europe to fill the "gaps" in the deterrence spectrum on both sides. And of course allies and once-were-allies of the big Two—the UK, China, France, Israel—joined in, their ranks later swelled in the 1990s by another deadly dyad, India and Pakistan, and finally a pariah ally of China, North Korea. (White South Africa arrived in and also dropped out of the nuclear club along the way and several others—Taiwan and South Korea at least-- began joining and thought better, or

were told to think better, of it.<sup>2)</sup>

No doubt the perceptions and doctrines of these later comers were somewhat distinct and none of them even aspired to produce arsenals on a superpower scale, although China, Britain, France and Israel put an H- after their A-, and any one of them, as we shall discover shortly, could have largely ruined our earthly habitat, and still can.

The American counterforce school of strategic thought, led by the charismatically weird Herman Kahn, echoing Carl von Clausewitz with his *On Thermonuclear War* (1959), strove mightily to persuade the world as well as the Pentagon that nuclear war was fightable and winnable, and school members at least managed to be taken seriously. However even then their arguments were hard to take seriously, laced as they were with artificiality and implausible assumptions and scenarios.<sup>3</sup> Stanley Kubrick in his classic movie satire, *Dr Strangelove: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb* (1964), skewered the leading protagonists of the debate--including Kahn himself, Henry Kissinger, who promoted limited nuclear war in the book that made his reputation, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (1958), and Curtis Le May, who was not only SAC (Strategic Air Command) supremo until 1957, but had been the leading architect of the World War II air campaigns for visiting fire *sturm* and nuclear *drang* on German and Japanese cities.

But neither the sophisticated scepticism of Kubrick, the alarums of the anti-nuclear movement led by Bertrand Russell and other luminaries in the fifties and sixties or the modest nostrums of the Minimum Deterrence school gained real traction, except among those middling powers (China, perhaps France) who were likely to face a superpower alone. And superpower arsenals went into "overkill" overdrive with the arrival of solid fuel and then multiple warhead strategic missiles in the 1960s.

## Stopping START

The superpower arsenals of yesteryear have been slashed since the end of the Cold War, but the numbers are still so huge as to make the reduction effectively marginal. They are now being held by one ailing or at least flailing superpower, the US, briefly hailed as a hyperpower in the 1990s, and one ex- superpower, but perhaps capable of recovering, Russia. For whatever reasons these two seem determined to keep up their hyperbolic nuclear arsenals, although President Barak Obama has moved to revive the warhead/missile disarmament spurt of the 1990s. The Big Two of yesteryear have produced and still deploy 95 per cent of the world's warheads and megatonnage, despite halving their arsenals since 1991 under the START I treaty.<sup>4</sup> The superpower designate

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<sup>2</sup> Ariel E Levite, 'Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited', *International Security*, vol 27, no 3 (Winter 2002/03)

<sup>3</sup> Philip Green, *Deadly Logic: The Theory of Nuclear Deterrence*, Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968

<sup>4</sup> Natural Resources Defense Council, 'Global Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945-2006', *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 62, 4, July/August 2006. By the *Bulletin* warhead count: US plus Russia=26,000; Rest of the World=800

of tomorrow, China, still, happily, has a comparatively modest arsenal of 240 warheads, making it the world No.4.<sup>5</sup>

President Barack Obama moved to “reset” US-Russian relations, including strategic relations, in his first six months in office, and, under his July 2009 preliminary agreement with counterpart Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow, a START successor treaty

would reduce the ceiling on strategic warheads to somewhere between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads within seven years, down from the current ceiling of 2,200 warheads by 2012. The limit on delivery vehicles — land-based intercontinental missiles, submarines-based missiles and bombers — would be somewhere from 500 to 1,100, down from the 1,600 currently allowed...

The United States reported in January that it had 1,198 delivery vehicles, and the [US] Arms Control Association estimates that it deploys 2,200 warheads. Russia reported 816 delivery vehicles, and the association estimates that it deploys 2,000 to 3,000 warheads.<sup>6</sup>

In other words the cuts will be rather modest even if a deal goes ahead by the December 2009 target date, and it is also dismaying that “American officials [in Moscow] said this treaty would not address warheads stored in reserve, something the Russians have wanted to include in the past.”<sup>7</sup> Of course weapons in a properly maintained stockpile can be made operationally ready in a very short time, and both sides to the Moscow agreement have thousands of such extra warheads.<sup>8</sup>

Actually START II, the START III predecessor treaty signed by George Bush senior and Boris Yeltsin in 1993, which proposed similar cuts, was ratified by both sides in 2002 but never came into force. Russia under President (now Prime Minister) Putin would not accept George Bush Junior's determination to withdraw America from the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty) which had been in force since 1972. This treaty limited the two sides to one ABM site each in home territory, but George W Bush proposed to deploy a comprehensive multi-site ABM system including sites in Europe. In June 2002 when the US finally withdrew from the ABM Treaty, Russia announced that it would no longer consider itself bound by START II.<sup>9</sup>

Among other things START II would have banned the deployment of MIRVs (Multiple Independently Targeted Re-entry Vehicles) on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.nucleardarkness.org/globalnucleararsenal/statusofworldnuclearforces>

<sup>6</sup> ‘U.S.-Russia Nuclear Agreement Is First Step in Broad Effort’, *New York Times*, 6 July 2009

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus.html> for current totals.

<sup>9</sup> In between START II and the new Obama initiative there was the US-Russian May 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions (or SORT) Treaty, signed (later ratified) by Presidents Putin and Bush. It was also known as “a sort of treaty”, for obvious reasons: although it committed the United States and Russia to reduce deployed strategic nuclear forces to 1,700-2,200 warheads each, it expires in 2012 when both sides would be free to increase; does not specify which warheads to reduce or how; sets no limits on stored or reserve warheads; makes no provision to destroy any warheads or delivery vehicles or regulate how to field them, and has no inspection provisions. See ‘The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) at a Glance’, Strategic Arms Control and Policy *Fact Sheet*, Arms Control Association, Washington DC, September 2006

Like the ABM Treaty itself this was an important measure to restrict the possibility of successful surprise attack, or at least increase confidence between the nuclear giants, since multiple warheads fired in quantity open up some remote theoretical prospect of a disarming first strike. Similarly, a large ABM deployment could theoretically help an aggressor deal with a weak retaliatory strike from a (missile-) crippled opponent. Barack Obama “has vowed to ratify the long-stalled [by his predecessor] Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, secure vulnerable nuclear materials around the world within four years and hold a nonproliferation summit meeting in Washington next year”<sup>10</sup>, and has renounced for the time being the Bush Junior plans for ballistic missile defence in Europe, which were strongly deplored by Moscow.<sup>11</sup> He has also, according to some reporting, promised far more drastic action to transform American nuclear posture, doctrine and arsenals.<sup>12</sup>

## Nuclear-induced Climate Change I

Of course “operationally deployed” warheads *are* the most dangerous kind, especially those assigned or able to be launched on warning rather than hard evidence of attack. Their numbers alone, until drastically reduced, will continue to pose catastrophic risks for humankind, not least of nuclear winter.<sup>13</sup> On this subject alarms were first sounded in the early 1980s (most prominently by Carl Sagan and Jonathan Schell) that after a large-scale nuclear war a global freeze would ensue from the millions of tons of soot injected into the stratosphere as cities and forests burned.<sup>14</sup> These alarms prompted mainly an avalanche of willful scepticism, much of it plausibly orchestrated by Des Ball of the Australian National University, who remains, apparently, unrepentant in denial.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ‘U.S.-Russia Nuclear Agreement Is First Step’

<sup>11</sup> ‘US missile program shelved by Obama’, Sydney Morning Herald, *September 18, 2009*

<sup>12</sup> ‘Obama has rejected the Pentagon’s first draft of the [quadrennial] Nuclear Posture Review [due in 2010] as being too timid, and has called for a range of more far-reaching options consistent with his goal of eventually abolishing nuclear weapons altogether’, including ‘reconfiguring the US nuclear force to allow for an arsenal measured in hundreds rather than thousands of deployed strategic warheads’, and ‘redrafting nuclear doctrine to narrow the range of conditions under which the US would use nuclear weapons.’ ‘Barack Obama ready to slash US nuclear arsenal’, *The Guardian*, 20 September 2009

<sup>13</sup> ‘Approximately 3,500 to 4,000 U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear warheads remain on high-alert status. These include a very high percentage of the warheads on (1) U.S. and Russian land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, (2) Russian ballistic missile submarines (which remain in port virtually all of the time), and (3) all the warheads on the four U.S. Trident submarines which are always kept at “hard alert” status, in position to fire. The total yield of these U.S. and Russian high-alert strategic nuclear forces is in the range of 1,300 MT to 1,700 MT, which is roughly equivalent to the explosive power of the 1,667 MT model used in the simulations’ [as devised by Alan Robock and his collaborators—Steven Starr’s chief source on nuclear winter data.] Starr, ‘Catastrophic Climatic Consequences of Nuclear Conflict’, N 29. See also Alan Robock, Luke Oman, and Georgiy L. Stenchikov, ‘Nuclear winter revisited with a modern climate model and current nuclear arsenals: Still catastrophic consequences’, *Journal of Geophysical Research – Atmospheres*, Vol. 112, No. D13, 2007

<sup>14</sup> Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*, Knopf, New York, 1982; Carl Sagan and Richard Turco, *A Path Where No Man Thought – Nuclear Winter and the End of the Arms Race*, Random House, New York, 1990, p. 42

<sup>15</sup> Des Ball, summarizing his debate with Carl Sagan of 20 years before, acknowledges that burning cities could generate up to 80 million tonnes of “smoke”, but seems to dismiss out of hand the nuclear winter hypothesis of the 1980s. Yet, also according to him, ‘Atmospheric physicists and biologists/ecologists demonstrated [sic] that the sudden injection of a couple of hundred million tonnes of smoke, soot and other particulate matter into the upper atmosphere would have catastrophic environmental consequences, characterised as “Nuclear Winter”’. Desmond Ball, ‘The Probabilities of “On the Beach”’: assessing “Armageddon Scenarios” in the 21st Century’, *SDSC Working*

But we now know that the real situation is even more dire than was supposed 20 years ago. Using the advanced modelling techniques developed to forecast climate change, American and Russian teams of independent researchers have come up with the persuasive conclusion that even a “small” nuclear exchange (unforgivable euphemism)--for instance between fledgling nuclear states India and Pakistan—involving “only a hundred weapons in total but targeted mainly on (highly inflammable as well as populous) cities--would create a disastrous climatic effect. Up to a billion deaths globally have been forecast from food crop devastation in this scenario, a stunningly larger casualty figure than the few tens of millions of “prompt deaths” forecast for the “combatant populations”. And a “large” nuclear war in which the two big nuclear powers shot off most of their deployed arsenals would put human survival—at least social survival--at risk from global freezing, independently of all the other dire but more familiar effects.<sup>16</sup>

This mortal danger for humanity and the biosphere as a whole is still inadequately acknowledged, partly perhaps because of the “crowding out” effect of the global warming debate. Here is how a leading US authority sums up the new science:

... the massive smoke emissions from the fires of a small “regional” nuclear war would cause a global climate change unprecedented in human history. In a matter of days, temperatures around the Earth would become colder than those experienced during the pre-industrial Little Ice Age (which occurred from approximately 1400 to 1850). Growing seasons in the middle latitudes would immediately be significantly shortened, completely eliminating some crops that had insufficient time to reach maturity.

This profound darkening of the sky would cause average global surface air temperatures to rapidly cool by 7-8° C. Even a decade after the fires had gone out, there would be enough smoke left in the stratosphere to cool the Earth’s average surface temperatures by 4° C. Both the moderate and large nuclear wars would produce cooling equal to or greater than that experienced 18,000 years ago during the coldest period of the last Ice Age<sup>32</sup> – and these temperature drops would occur abruptly in a matter of days or weeks, rather than over centuries or millennia.<sup>17</sup>

All this is without taking into account the better known impacts of nuclear strikes on cities and industries, arsenals and infrastructure—tens if not hundreds of millions of “prompt” (i.e., mostly immediate) deaths from blast, fire and radiation, and many, many more millions from long-term effects. Of course the capacity of individual countries and the world as a whole to do anything effective about short and long term climate impacts of large-scale nuclear strikes,

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*Paper* no. 401, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 2006, p 4 . Presumably Des still stands behind his much lower estimates of smoke and soot generation in large-scale attacks.

<sup>16</sup> Starr, 'Catastrophic Climatic Consequences of Nuclear Conflict'; 'The Consequences of Nuclear Conflict between India and Pakistan', Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC),

<sup>17</sup> Starr, citing Robock, 'Catastrophic Climatic Consequences of Nuclear Conflict', ref N32

including widespread starvation, sickness and exposure, could be totally compromised by other immediate and short term effects of those strikes.

In other words choosing to be in a nuclear war, to strike first, second or later, is almost guaranteed to be suicide and not just in the classical deterrence manner—that any nuclear strike of your own against a nuclear actor will supposedly and unfailingly bring down vengeful retaliation on your head. No, if you are the US or Russia—or indeed if you are France, Britain or China—or even “tiny” Israel with, nevertheless, several hundred warheads--unless your retaliation is moderate indeed and directed away from cities it will bring down disastrous climate results upon yourself and everyone else—as of course may the first strike of the putative aggressor.

But wait a moment...

If all the nuclear players are aware or become aware of these facts about the ease of inducing nuclear winter, and if therefore their supposed self interest in nuclear aggression or retaliation alike evaporates, why would they ever seriously plan or contemplate nuclear use at all?<sup>18</sup>

It's a good question. Nuclear intoxication of the kind which gripped the US and the USSR in the 1960s on the whole seems to have died away in the established nuclear states. But India and Pakistan both suffered serious bouts of nuclear euphoria and trigger happiness in the course of establishing their current nuclear arsenals.<sup>19</sup> The citizens of both these countries frequently display a quite remarkable complacency about the dangers they have cooperatively entered into by nuclearising their chronic conflicts over Kashmir, religion-inspired terrorism (Hindu and Islamic) and the very existence of a religion-based Pakistan alongside putatively secular India. The second Bush administration was wont to swear that it was ready to brandish and wield the Bomb in a large array of non-nuclear as well as nuclear threat scenarios.<sup>20</sup> But by and large there seems to be not much American appetite globally for nuclear combat in the era of Obama.

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<sup>18</sup> Expert proponents of smaller arsenals and nuclear de-alerting see these measures as an urgent priority for the big nuclear Big Two. Being anxious not to panic military audiences excessively they incline to tolerate simple old-fashioned city-busting retaliation as an acceptable slow motion alternative to launch-under-attack counterforce strategy. But “counter-cities” would remain not only morally and logically dubious but certain to induce deep nuclear winter.

<sup>19</sup> Ball, *The Probabilities of “On the Beach”*, p 12

<sup>20</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Sept. 17, 2002) <[www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf)>

I propose to deal with the good question identified above by going back to basics and “interrogating”, as the postmoderns would have it, the eternal—also infernal—verities of deterrence theory in the perspective of the shadows cast on them (pardon the pun) by deadly climate change arising from nuclear conflict. This interrogation will show up a failure to clarify or even be seriously concerned about what strategic self interest might really involve in a nuclear standoff or showdown, and an extraordinary degree of callousness and casualness in devising and evaluating nuclear conflict scenarios, particularly when it comes to justifying—or not bothering to justify—massive (including massive preemptive) or indeed any nuclear retaliation at all.

We shall be mainly considering the ex-superpower standoff as it has evolved since 1991 but the approach taken will be seen to cover other bilateral (India-Pakistan, India-China) and alliance (NATO-Russia) balances of terror and potential error quite well. One other needful preliminary is to sketch the various mainstream doctrines for nuclear use in case of war as they have evolved since the 1950s.

### **The Targeteers and the SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan)**

We know considerably more about American nuclear targeting than any other, and so it's of greater interest for the purposes of debate than any other, not only for this reason but because of the huge amount of destruction explicitly envisaged in it and also for the much-vaunted “flexibility” that has been built into it since the 1950s. It's true that both Soviet and Russian approaches have been more monolithic but we shall see that Washington's flexibility has its limits and in any case never extended to riding out a large attack without launching a massive retaliation, whatever successive Presidents may have thought about the briefings that appeared to offer them a withholding option.

The SIOP (“actual targeting orders, timing, and weapon allocation”<sup>21</sup>) has been officially replaced since 2003 by various so called CONPLANs (contingency plans) of which the SIOP equivalent, or general war plan, is CONPLAN 8044—still often referred to as the SIOP in fact. Based on formal Presidential instructions it is put together by the United States Strategic Command (US STRATCOM—formerly, until 1992, SAC, the Strategic Air Command). According to a study done in 2001,

the number of targets in the NTB [National Target Base] has varied enormously - from

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<sup>21</sup> 'Single Integrated Operational Plan', *Wikipedia*, June 2008

around 16,000 in 1985, 12,500 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and 2,500 in 1995 before rising to the current list of 3,000 targets. Around 75% of the current targets are in Russia; of these, 1,100 are nuclear weapons sites.<sup>22</sup>

This last target set, the high priority “counterforce” option, emerged explicitly and strongly in the Kennedy presidency under Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. In the whole period up to 1990 there were four basic categories of targets in the SIOP:

- ‘Soviet nuclear forces;
- other military targets (OMT);
- military and political leadership facilities (including C3 [Command, Control and Communication] systems) , and
- economic and industrial installations.’<sup>23</sup>

People and houses as such do not appear (except as “collateral damage”), but category four is for them--a large scale reprise of Dresden and Hiroshima was assured for the USSR and remains in force for the new Russia, while category two would likely also contribute to civilian mass death with its very likely pointless mass attack on conventional ground and naval forces, as indeed would option A entailing attacks on command and communication facilities in cities as well as at more remote missile, submarine and air bases. And of course we are not just talking about fire, blast, firestorm and “prompt” radiation but short and long-term fallout. Deliberate and “collateral” deaths and casualties in the hundreds of millions would be guaranteed.

Nixon's Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger (1973-75), presided over a major drive to expand the options open to the President to avoid all-out war in a nuclear crisis while the US was tacitly enjoying so-called escalation dominance. According to the Schlesinger Doctrine as it became known:

1. The National Command Authority or its successors should have many choices about the use of weapons, always having an option to escalate.
2. Targeting should make it very explicit that the first requisite is selective retaliation against the enemy's military (i.e., tailored counterforce).
3. Some targets and target classes should not be struck, at least at first, to give the opponent a rational reason to terminate the conflict. Reduced collateral damage was another benefit of this "withhold" method.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Desmond Ball and Robert C. Toth, ‘Revising the SIOP: Taking War-Fighting to Dangerous Extremes’, *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Spring, 1990), p 70

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

Here arose sharply the issue whether controlled escalation is more than strategic fantasy—the issue hangs on the survival of one’s “C3 I”—Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence, and the inherent urgency (and associated dangers) of exercising the counterforce option.

## US Nuclear Command and Control—and Safety

How to manage the whole retaliatory enterprise? There is a long history. Eisenhower pre-delegated nuclear release authority to certain senior commanders because command and control in the hands of the White House were thought to be not “survivable”, but once there were airborne command posts available Continuity of Nuclear Operations Plans (COOP) have theoretically not entailed pre-delegation, just a list of “designated ...subordinates who, in the event of the NCA (National Command Authority) and immediate successors being killed in a "decapitation" attack, could still retaliate.”<sup>25</sup>

And the “two man” (sic) rule is supposed to apply from the top to the bottom of the command chain—from the Secretary of Defense endorsing the President's decision to the requirement that the launch control officers at a Minuteman missile control post, for instance, must wait to receive the warhead arming code for the day before two of them turn their individual keys simultaneously and independently in the lock for launch keys and/or launch codes. This was nuclear safety's friendly PAL or Permissive Action Link arrangement.

However we have long known that much of the reassurance about the military commitment to safe operational standards and civilian control of the whole process is just higher whitewash for the White House and the Great Unwashed public alike. Our best authority for that is the leading—and unhappily rare—whistleblower in the field, former missile launch control officer, Bruce Blair. As late as 2004 he was able to inform former Secretary McNamara, who introduced the PAL, that it had been a sham:

What I... told McNamara about his vitally important locks elicited this response: “I am shocked, absolutely shocked and outraged. Who the hell authorized that?” What he had just learned from me was that the locks had been installed, but everyone knew the combination... The Strategic Air Command (SAC) in Omaha quietly decided to set the “locks” to all zeros in order to circumvent this safeguard. During the early to mid-1970s, during my stint as a Minuteman launch officer, they still had not been changed.... SAC remained far less concerned about unauthorized launches than about the potential of these safeguards to interfere with the implementation of wartime launch orders. And so the “secret unlock code” during the height of the nuclear crises of the Cold War remained constant at OOOOOOOO.<sup>26</sup>

McNamara's PAL arrangements were reactivated in 1977 under pressure from Bruce Blair's revelations but other features of an inherently unsafe system have persisted, as we shall see.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> 'Keeping Presidents in the Nuclear Dark, Episode #1', *Bruce Blair's Nuclear Column*, Center for Defense Information, Washington DC, 11 February 2004

Another major revelation from an inherently plausible source came from no less than a retired SAC commander. In 1994 former Air Force General George Lee Butler told journalist and long-time peace activist, Jonathan Schell, that

Part of the insidiousness of the evolution of this system ... is the unfortunate fact that, whatever might have been *intended* by the policymakers (who, incidentally, had very little insight into the mechanisms that underpinned the simple words that floated onto a blank page at the level of the White House), *in reality*, at the operational level, the requirements of deterrence proved impracticable.... The consequence was a move in practice to a system structured to drive the president invariably toward a decision to launch under attack.... Launch under attack means that you believe you have incontrovertible proof that warheads actually are on the way..... Our policy was premised on being able to accept the first wave of attacks. We never said publicly that we were committed to launch on warning or launch under attack. Yet at the operational level it was never accepted that if the presidential decisions went to a certain tick of the clock, we would lose a major portion of our forces... Notwithstanding the intention of deterrence as it is expressed at the *policy* level – as it is declared and written down – at the level of *operations* those intentions got turned on their head, as the people who are responsible for actually devising the war plan faced the dilemmas and blind alleys of concrete practice. Those mattered absolutely to the people who had to sit down and try to frame the detailed guidance to exact destruction of 80 percent of the adversary’s nuclear forces. When they realized that they could not in fact assure those levels of damage if the president chose to ride out an attack, what then did they do? They built a construct that powerfully biased the president’s decision process toward launch *before* the arrival of the first enemy warhead.<sup>27</sup>

“...to exact destruction of 80 percent of the opponent's forces”...For this pointless objective (since 20 per cent of Russian forces were and are enough to make America, not to mention humanity, as we know it a memory) SAC/STRATCOM—and the Soviet/Russian high command--have had the planet living with an imponderable but considerable risk of human as well as American and Russian oblivion for upwards of half a century. But this objective was/is not only pointless--it is unachievable. For if the enemy missiles have flown, they cannot, by definition, be attacked in their silo or submarine nests. Assuming the whereabouts of most of them are known and the incoming trajectories on radar and satellite feed will give at least a rough picture of the enemy’s order of battle post salvo #1, the targets to attack will (“should”) be mostly “other military targets” (OMT), “military and political leadership facilities” [including leadership faculties,

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<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: the Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons Now*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 1998, pp. 191-194. The pressures are similar on the Soviet/Russian side. The nearest approach to *homo sapiens finis* was probably an episode at *Serpukhov 15* early warning station outside Moscow in 1983 when the unsung saviour of the planet, Lt. Col. Stanislav Petrov, faced with a computer which showed five American MIRVed missiles (15-50 warheads in total) on the way to the USSR, disregarded standing orders and failed to press his red START button to begin the launch countdown for the Strategic Rocket Forces. This Soviet computer glitch echoed an episode at the North American Air Defense Command in 1979 when “a clumsy Air Force officer left a simulation tape running in NORAD’s computer systems, prompting the ICBM force to begin prepping their missiles and sending bomber crews on alert rushing to their aircraft.” See ‘The Man Who Saved the World’, <http://officersclub.blogspot.com/2006/02/man-who-saved-world.html>

presumably, leaving no one alive to negotiate with] and “economic and industrial installations”—none of which of course are surrounded by millions of innocent people living in cities. In other words a futile attempted disarming strike will be accompanied by a pointless and entirely inappropriate genocide. (A people cannot vote to press a release button but a Maniac or manic episode, Misperception, Malfunction, Malfeasance--or Malware<sup>28</sup>--can bring it about.)

## The Unconditional Withholding Option

Military commanders are licensed, and civilian strategic “experts” (“crackpot realists”, as C Wright Mills used to call them<sup>29</sup>; “missile liberals” according to David Riesman<sup>30</sup>) are self-licensed or corporate-licensed via conservative think-tanks, to think the all-too-thinkable: in effect preparing the extinction of our species to safeguard “national security”. I used to deal with crackpot realism and missile liberalism—penile liberalism for Carol Cohn<sup>31</sup>, doyenne of anti-militarist feminism—by a painstaking effort to point out the very peculiar structure of interests which would obtain if push came to shove in a nuclear standoff.<sup>32</sup>

I argued that if you attack my missiles only I have no interest in initiating a city attack. If you attack my cities comprehensively I have no interest in attacking yours since I am ruined in any case and may even cease to function as a state. (My “national interest” may become purely putative; the “I” of strategic studies may have ceased to exist.) In any case, attacks do not come labeled as to author or authorizing authority, whether or not a mistake has been committed, or a madman is at the helm, or the attack is about to be disowned, or...or... Massive retaliation against civilians in cities, even democratically enfranchised ones, is--as it has been in some fashion throughout history--against the laws and customs of war, elementary morality and logic and common sense. Strategic doctrine mainly serves to sanitise the massacre/genocide element inherent in nuclear weaponry, and its punitive element is peculiarly inappropriate since the

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<sup>28</sup> See Jason Fritz, ‘*Hacking Nuclear Command and Control*’, *Research Paper*, ICNND website, 2009. John Hallam and I seem to have arrived independently at very similar lists of “M”-type potential causes of nuclear mayhem.

<sup>29</sup> C Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*, [Simon and Schuster](#), New York, 1958

<sup>30</sup> Interview, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, February 1961

<sup>31</sup> Carol Cohn, ‘Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12(4), 1987. Carol undertook a nuclear weapons and strategic studies summer school in 1984. She vividly recalls (p 695) being congratulated for patting a B-1 bomber, and being informed by an (inevitably male) lecturer that “to disarm is to get rid of all your stuff.” (p 693) Her epigraph is a quotation from *Through the Looking Glass* wherein the Queen informs Alice that “sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

<sup>32</sup> Peter King, *The Strategy of Total Withholding*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No.12, 1971; ‘A Critique of Strategic Studies’, in Desmond Ball (ed.), *Strategy and Defence: Australian Essays*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982; ‘A Requiem for Strategic Studies: Global and Pacific Perspectives’ in Richard Higgott and James L. Richardson (eds.), *International Relations: Global and Australian Perspectives on an Evolving Discipline*, Department of International Relations, Australian National University, 1991

putative authors – one man or a very small handful of men – of the nuclear aggression under consideration are by definition able to ensure or at least plan their own survival from retaliation. The highly vulnerable (by contrast) citizen mass can scarcely be deemed culpable except to the extent they have been lulled into patriotic complacency or mental paralysis by knowing (or know-all) strategic elites, whose complicity in any general nuclear catastrophe beforehand will of course be considerable.

It has always seemed to me exceedingly obvious that if one were actually attacked one's best interests would be served by a policy of indefinite wait and see—if only, to concede a point to the strategists, to employ by implicit threat one's surviving weaponry to garner some support and succour in the nuclear aftermath against an opponent with cities intact.

But far from the withholding idea getting to the centre of strategic attention it has invariably been treated as an exotic option, a partial strategy of flexibility – “withholds” would apply variously to targeted leaderships, cities, allies of the enemy, et cetera, with a serious all-out war option always ultimately in view. My modest proposal and preference remains for Unconditional Non-use – on the understanding that nuclear weapons are ultimately of No Use. The withholding option must have as its ultimate sub- or grand option an Unconditional Withholding Strategy. There is even a case for self-disarmament – or at least self-paralysis, as when an inspired missile controller in the US had heavy trucks driven onto missile silo lids when Armageddon by accident beckoned in Wyoming in 1984.<sup>33</sup>

It is a feature of strategic studies, academic, bureaucratic and military alike, that so-called collateral effects and issues surrounding the nuclear arsenal must be rigorously or at least haphazardly excluded from deterrence calculations. Official and scholarly strategic pronouncements in the civilized West typically promise genocide (actually, multiple genocides) without conscience, compunction or even self-consciousness—and it is no different in the East, except perhaps for an extraordinary dissensus on the legality of nuclear threat and use among Soviet international lawyers in the 1970s and later.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ‘On January 10, 1984...Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, recorded a message that one of its Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles was about to launch from its silo due to a computer malfunction. To prevent the possible launch, an armored car was parked on top of the silo.’ See Jaya Tiwari and Cleve J. Gray, *U. S. Nuclear Weapons Accidents*, Center for Defense Information, Washington, DC, website, nd, citing Shaun Gregory, *The Hidden Cost of Deterrence: Nuclear Weapons Accidents*, Brassey's UK, London, 1990, pp. 181-182

<sup>34</sup> Peter King, 'Two Eyes for a Tooth: The State of Soviet Strategic Doctrine', *Survey* (London), 24, 1, Winter 1979, pp.45-57

Yet to acquire nuclear weapons is not only to take innocent hostages without limit on the Other side, but to ensure your own population becomes doubly hostage, once (or more than once) to the weapons of the Other or Others<sup>35</sup>, and once to one's own weapons. In all current cases, from Pakistan to the USA, nuclear weapons are capable not only of triggering the opponent, but of triggering a nuclear winter for oneself as well as everybody else, whether released by accident or design. Moreover going (or remaining) nuclear without the monopoly status that the US enjoyed from 1945-49 entails an act of faith in the (strategic) "rationality" of the nuclear opponent. Since his madness or mistakes seem more likely to trigger an attack (or retaliation) than "rational" calculation, this act of faith would seem to be particularly touching or dumb. India and Pakistan have long been a willfully consenting nuclear pairing and so were the US and the USSR/Russia in the end. A corollary of this consensual folly is the promiscuous proliferation theory of the most celebrated realist theoretician of international relations, Kenneth Waltz. He contends that the spread of always caution-inducing nuclear weapons far and wide is a positive, stabilising good, reductively eliding the human-all-too-human from the nuclear conundrum.<sup>36</sup>

A pioneering American book on nuclear targeting issues in the late 1980s offered a chance at least to balance morality and deterrence, and its editors, though not the other authors, at least on this occasion, seem fitfully aware of larger issues. Des Ball and Jeffrey Richelson tell us that US nuclear target planning through the 1950s "had frequently been arbitrary and inefficient and sometimes irrational."<sup>37</sup> But Des Ball's attempts to discover or propound well-founded, efficient and rational targeting principles are fitful, half-hearted and confused at best.<sup>38</sup> He does note that strategic and specifically targeting studies are frequently treated as a license to discover and recommend new exotic methods and pretexts or rationalizations for killing millions of people.<sup>39</sup> And he cautions against the "genocidal connotations" and "serious moral and practical problems" of a passing Washington fad or enthusiasm in the 1980s for so-called ethnic targeting against the Soviet majority population, the Russians.<sup>40</sup> However he and his book fellows blithely

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<sup>35</sup> The USSR/Russia for decades has faced at least four declared or implicit nuclear opponents: the US, Britain, France and China.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Waltz, 'The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better,' *Adelphi Papers*, Number 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981). However realists do deserve the title when they oppose (as they fairly consistently do) the *guerre du jour* (Morgenthau/Vietnam; Waltz, et al/Iraq) or the Israeli incubus in US foreign policy (Walt, Mearsheimer).

<sup>37</sup> Desmond Ball and Jeffrey Richelson (eds), *Strategic Nuclear Targeting*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1986, Preface

<sup>38</sup> As one of Ball's co-authors, Lawrence Freedman, says elsewhere: 'four [now six] decades after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear strategists had still failed to come up with any convincing methods of employing nuclear weapons should deterrence fail that did not wholly offend common sense'. See his 'Eliminators, Marginalists, and the Politics of Disarmament' in John Baylis and Robert O'Neill (eds), *Alternative Nuclear Futures: the Role of Nuclear Weapons in the Post-Cold War World*, Oxford University Press, 1991

<sup>39</sup> Ball and Richelson, *Strategic Nuclear Targeting*, p 26

<sup>40</sup> In any case Des Ball in remarking that, 'if deterrence were to fail, it would be morally wrong to attack "captive peoples" who would be innocent of any responsibility for the war,' appears to be endorsing attacks on the Russians—who of course in Soviet times (and now again) could scarcely be accused of practical political

fail to acknowledge at any point the multi-genocidal connotations of targeting policies (more blatantly practiced by Britain and France than the United States) guaranteed to bring about the deaths of multi-ethnic Soviet (now Federal Russian) citizens by the tens of millions.

The valuable capacity for abstraction shown by those who would recommend or treat as acceptable human behaviour the execution of nuclear strikes on “economic, industrial and administrative targets” as though it were perfectly reasonable to disregard the rights and lives of the human targets they contain seems all too easy to acquire. In the West we are all supposed to assent to targeting strategies which would put a value of zero on the treasures and splendors of Moscow and St Petersburg and the lives of a hundred million heirs of Pushkin, not to mention those of a thousand million sons and daughters of Confucius. And we do, by the many millions, since we are for the most part nuclear patriots of one kind or another, including ignorantly tacit ones.

As Mary Kaldor says:

Arms control [as opposed to disarmament] proposals are based on a geo-political statist understanding of the world. The possession and implicit threat to use nuclear weapons is associated with an absolutist view of state sovereignty. The possession of nuclear weapons implies an absolutist prerogative on the part of states to risk the lives of its own citizens on a massive scale not to mention citizens in other countries without any prior public debate or discussion. The use of nuclear weapons would constitute an unimaginable violation of human rights and hence the implication of their possession is that states have the right to inflict such an unimaginable violation.<sup>41</sup>

## **Nuclear Climate Change II**

A big problem with the nuclear patriotic view, as it arose after Hiroshima and consolidated itself in the sixties and seventies, emerged in the eighties when alarms were first raised about nuclear winter. Up to then some sort of national (and human) survival was assumed to be possible—the big nuclear war scenario was fairly reliably non-Doomsday.<sup>42</sup> The devastated, homeless, demoralized, irradiated and therefore (by the million) still dying citizenry would nevertheless be

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responsibility for anything. Ball and Richelson, *Strategic Nuclear Targeting*, p 29. Throughout the rest of the book what is “morally wrong” here on page 29 appears by and large to be perfectly normal and acceptable.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Kaldor, ‘Dismantling the global nuclear infrastructure’, *Open Democracy*, 11 August 2009

<sup>42</sup> As argued by Des Ball in 2005: ‘The Probabilities of “On the Beach”’

capable of restoring some kind of functioning economy and society, albeit at a primitive level. (With almost supreme heartlessness the Americans used to keep a special place in the SIOP for so-called “recovery targets” in the USSR.)

The new studies on nuclear climate change throw that assumption into grave doubt. Nuclear attack which failed to eliminate the overwhelming bulk of a big power opponent’s arsenal was always going to be suicidal because of inevitable retaliation--so the argument ran. Now we know that it will be directly suicidal—in fact omnicidal (and also biocidal): albeit a drawn-out suicide and omnicide--if enough cities, forests, peat swamps and prairies burn. And we know from the virtual co-location of Russian ICBM fields with cities West of the Urals that there will be cities burning from a “purely” counterforce US strike,<sup>43</sup> while so-called “leadership” targets, not to mention OMT (Other Military Targets), as noted above, are largely in or close to cities. Moreover British targeting has always been preoccupied with Moscow<sup>44</sup>, and French targeting variously with “anticities” (150-200 at least to be struck, if possible), *les oeuvres vivres* (vital works) of Soviet/Russian society and “anti-demographic” attacks.<sup>45</sup> As for the fact if not so clearly the theory of massive American city targeting, it is unfortunate that the Hiroshima/Nagasaki precedent for nuclear city destruction—not to mention the Hamburg, Dresden (and Tokyo) fire bombing--has never been properly rethought or repented at official level, either politically or morally.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, what we urgently need, as Steven Starr insists, are Environmental Impact Statements that would evaluate the environmental consequences resulting from the use of nuclear arsenals detonated in conflict.<sup>47</sup> In any case the idea of a slow economic and social recovery from nuclear war has gone out the window of opportunity that existed when arsenals numbered in the dozens rather than tens of thousands. Serious recovery of any kind is scarcely imaginable if global agriculture is going to collapse within weeks (or at most months) of the big nuclear war which really will end wars and the biosphere as we know it.

Yet the issue of deadly climate change from nuclear war has not yet gained enough traction for this perception to take hold beyond a few concerned scientific and humanist circles. Above all the global Green constituency is not engaged with the issue as it could and should be. Why

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<sup>43</sup> Desmond Ball, ‘Towards a Critique of Strategic Nuclear Targeting’, in Ball and Richelson, *Strategic Nuclear Targeting*, p 21

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Freedman, ‘British Nuclear Targeting’, in *ibid*

<sup>45</sup> David S Yost, ‘French Nuclear Targeting’, in *ibid*, pp 133-5

<sup>46</sup> Yet Americans can “do” apology—*vide* the Presidential/ Congressional apology and compensation under Reagan to Nisei Japanese (!) for their internment and demonisation during the Pacific War, and the long march beginning under Clinton to apologise for historical offences to Hawaiians and Native Americans.

<sup>47</sup> See Steven Starr and Peter King, ‘Nuclear Suicide’, *Unleashed* (ABC website, with extensive blogging), 31 July 2009. Also online at <http://www.sciencealert.com.au/opinions/20090208-19496.html>

shouldn't the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change grasp the nettle – or the World Meteorological Organisation commission a follow-up study to the one it sponsored in 1984 which gave some credence to the earlier work on nuclear winter?<sup>48</sup> The new work by Toon, Robock and collaborators needs urgent confirmation and follow-up studies for which significant funding seems to be in short supply.<sup>49</sup>

The costs and complexity of greenhouse gas abatement are enormous, as are the resources of the industries and interests still in effective denial on that issue. Indeed, thanks to decades of politically poisonous denial the tipping point for unstoppable disastrous sea rise may already have been passed. But from one point of view, at least, the political problem of averting the risk of disastrous environmental consequences following nuclear war is altogether easier than avoiding greenhouse meltdown, even though all-too-plausible war scenarios promise to accomplish in a few minutes a far more rapid and damaging climatic outcome than is emerging from 200 years of carbon-rich headlong industrial revolution. In brief, no less is required than for big and small power nuclear weapons inventories and nuclear strategic establishments to be wound rapidly back to zero at an enormous cost saving (\$100 billion per annum in the American case alone) by a negotiated set of agreements led by the Big Two or perhaps Three (adding China). The Cold War duo that failed to achieve radical nuclear disarmament in the 1990s, and then discovered new, invalid reasons for continuing their alert gladiatorial postures in the 2000s, must agree to de-alert their weapons and slash their own stockpiles in the first instance rather than simply put military pressure on new proliferators and with luck and all-round dedication it need not take an accidental Hiroshima to do it.

## **The ICNND and the Planetary Future**

Clearly, the supreme emergency for humanity that we face requires at least a businesslike focus on the research gap over nuclear induced climate change and the lack of public awareness and understanding of it that has persisted for a quarter century.<sup>50</sup> Beyond that, a serious response to the peer-reviewed predictions of environmental catastrophe from nuclear conflict and grossly inflated big power arsenals requires a radical rearrangement of world priorities. The Australian/Japanese International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament

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<sup>48</sup> G.S. Golitsyn and N.A. Phillips, *Possible climatic consequences of a major nuclear war*, WCP-113, WMO/TD #99, 1986, cited in 'Nuclear Winter', *Wikipedia*, September 2008

<sup>49</sup> An imaginative effort at predicting post nuclear winter conditions globally at the height of the "first wave" debate was A Barrie Pittock, *Beyond Darkness: Nuclear Winter in Australia and New Zealand*, Sun Books, Sydney, 1987

<sup>50</sup> In his classic treatise, *Just and Unjust Wars* (Penguin, London, 1978) Michael Walzer borrowed the "supreme emergency" concept from Churchill, seemingly to justify last-ditch nuclear use by a United States under nuclear threat (Chapter 16). 'Deterrence itself', he concludes, 'for all its criminality, falls or may fall for the moment under the standard of necessity.' (p 283) Under a self-imposed "statist geopolitical" spell Walzer quite fails to notice or argue from the supreme emergency for humanity which would arise in such a scenario.

(ICNND) which was set up in mid-2008 offers one avenue for pursuing a global agenda shift. It will report to its sponsoring governments by January 2010 in advance of the five-yearly Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held shortly afterwards.

The ICNND, successor to the 1991 Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, also established by an Australian Labor Party (ALP) government, has shown considerable vigour under the leadership (jointly with former Japanese foreign minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi) of Gareth Evans, a former ALP foreign minister and President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group. An impressive, albeit quite conservative, international board and set of advisors, and a talented bureaucratic staff in Canberra, have worked hard, and the international consultation effort has been wide-ranging and open-minded.<sup>51</sup> The forty or so commissioned papers on the ICNND website include, for instance, excellent work by a partner research organization on the dynamics of proliferation and deproliferation<sup>52</sup>, a very useful long overview of the negotiation status of arms control and disarmament issues by the Commission's research coordinator<sup>53</sup>, and several papers by that veteran Soviet/Russian strategic jack of all trades, Alexei Arbatov.

The ICNND is the latest in a long line of government-sponsored international inquiries and collective anti-nuclear initiatives by small groups of self-appointed, formerly conservative, celebrated wise men (always men). In the latter category most recently there has been a series of declarations and follow-up statements launched first in 2007 by former US defence and diplomatic heavyweights, George P. Shultz, William J. Perry and Henry A. Kissinger<sup>54</sup>, who were later echoed and supported by ex-Congressman Sam Nunn and others, the aim always being rhetorically radical: to turn the nuclear problem around, or put the genie back in the bottle, as one used to say, and get back to pre-Alamogordo nuclear zero.

Actually the heavyweights in question have gone on being conservative despite their putative commitment to total nuclear disarmament.<sup>55</sup> But Gareth Evans has struck some fresh notes in his spiritedly metaphorical public interventions on behalf of the Commission:

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.icnnd.org/>

<sup>52</sup> Paul Davis, 'Giving up the Bomb', Centre for International Governance and Innovation, Carleton University, Canada, May 2009

<sup>53</sup> Ken Berry, 'Review of Recent Literature on Nuclear Issues'

<sup>54</sup> George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, 'A World Free of Nuclear Weapons: Ending the threat of nuclear arms', *Hoover Digest*, No 1, 2007

<sup>55</sup> 'Gorbachev, Shultz, Nunn, Perry Urge a Nuclear-Free World', *Time*, 4 May 2009

We are on the brink after years ... of containing rather well the emergence of new nuclear weapons states ... we are on the verge of another avalanche or cascade...

The scale of the proliferation problem is "right up there" with climate change and the current financial crisis, with estimates of between 13,000 and 16,000 warheads actively deployed around the world...

For the last decade or so, the international community has been sleepwalking when it comes to this potential catastrophe.<sup>56</sup>

But no, 13000 deployed warheads (2000 plus on hard alert) is not up there with climate change and the financial crisis – it is way up above the other two on its own as a longstanding, immediate and persisting planetary emergency: suicide, genocide, omnicide and biocide able to be dealt out in minutes or at most hours by at least two and probably five or even six existing nuclear powers. And proliferation is not the central, most urgent, nuclear problem– that problem is the existing arsenals of the recognised nuclear powers, and their alert status<sup>57</sup>..

This is the perspective which Steven Starr and I have been urging on Commission Co-chair Evans and the Commission's Canberra bureaucracy and advisory panel this year:

If the dire threat of needless Armageddon and nuclear winter and the implausible foundations of nuclear deterrence theory were better understood the way would be open to a consensual move towards a much tougher anti-proliferation regime and drastic reduction and de-alerting of super and ex-super power arsenals.<sup>58</sup>

Although there is no commissioned Commission paper which treats the nuclear winter or accidental pre-emptive nuclear war issue directly, Starr's papers have apparently been circulated to the ICNND's 14 Commissioners. As Lawrence Freedman (member of the Commission's Advisory Board) has argued, the public is no longer so alarmed by nuclear weapons as in the last phase of the Cold War, and a new mass campaign will be hard to build.<sup>59</sup> But Freedman still clings perversely to the "geopolitical statist understanding" of the world identified by Mary Kaldor. In his recent paper for the Sydney-based Lowy Institute on the need to discover a new

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<sup>56</sup> 'World facing nuclear threat: commission', *The Age*, 21 October 2008. In a recent and very brilliant wide-ranging interview with Peter Mares, Evans repeated that 'when you take into account the risk that's associated with some serious use of this [nuclear] stuff, we are looking at a global problem which is really commensurate in scale with that of global warming'. Still, however, there was no mention of global nuclear darkness and freezing. See 'Australian efforts towards nuclear disarmament' (audio and transcript), *The National Interest on ABC Radio National*, 18 September 2009.

See also his submissions and interventions on behalf of the ICNND in *Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament*, Report 106 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties of the Commonwealth Parliament, Canberra, September 2009

<sup>57</sup> It seems Britain and even France may have moderated their alert levels in recent years—Britain (Trident submarines) even by days. See John Hallam, 'Briefing Paper on Nuclear Weapons Systems Operational Readiness: Commonsense Measures to Avoid an Accidental Apocalypse', UN General Assembly First Committee October 2008/ Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, Commonwealth Parliament of Australia, January/February 2009

<sup>58</sup> Peter King, Email Letter to Gareth Evans, 22 May 2009

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence Freedman, 'Nuclear Disarmament: the need for a new theory', Lowy Institute *Perspectives* paper, March 2009. A very interesting new study

theory of nuclear disarmament Freedman quotes Hedley Bull at approving length, including *obiter dicta* to the effect that: “a state can provide for its security and protect its interests only by its own armed strength and that of its allies”, and “armaments are a consequence, not a cause of political tension.”<sup>60</sup>

But it can confidently be argued that the established nuclear powers have utterly jeopardized their security and interests (never mind ours), including their strategic interests—Britain and France by building and keeping weaponry not needed to deter the USSR/Russia (cf Germany) and guaranteed to ensure their own retaliatory destruction if used against that power; the US and USSR/Russia by getting stuck with an inappropriate and dangerous Cold War posture whereby accidental launch of even a small fraction of their own weaponry could entail suicide by nuclear winter even if their putative enemies decided not to respond in kind. As for China, which has more reason than the West European duo to be nuclear, it could at a stretch trust in the kind of mechanism which saved it from a Soviet strike against its nascent nuclear arsenal in 1969—an American veto communicated to Brezhnev by Nixon!

A senseless and frozen over-armed nuclear standoff among the big powers in which the ideological, military and territorial struggles of yesteryear are just a bad memory surely cannot be explained without close attention to the interests of the multi-billion dollar mutually reinforcing and reciprocally justifying strategic nuclear establishments which stand to be stood down if strategic (and human) sanity prevails. Might one not venture the thought that agreeing to de-alerting and putting an end to the mutual targeting of thousands of weapons by other weapons would draw undue attention to the all-round absurdity of the Big Two nuclear postures? More importantly, it might put an end to the rule of that strange imperative of deterrence theory, that senseless attack can be deterred by senseless (even anticipatory) retaliation? At present, in a nuclear crisis, the two ex-superpower civilian decision makers would barely have time to say yea or nay, let alone think. The military and academic/strategic elites who have fashioned and sustained this context need to be held to account.

In this perspective, the hard-nosed, time-worn verities of deterrence theory, and the blithe spirits who profess them, “are melted into air, into thin air”, as Shakespeare has it. If it is not in my interest to possess or use nuclear weapons even for retaliation the theory lab becomes very airy indeed. If it is not in my interest to attack but even less in my interest to respond to attack then deterrence theory is a myth falsely propagated by those who value the kudos of wielding the power of life and megadeath even over their own self-interest.

How to keep the balance of terror indelicate? As I said at the outset, for the strategic mainstream the capability to destroy *and* the intent to do it must be maximized. But if self and other interests tend strongly to undermine intent-to-use, what is to be done? Why, if rational intent seems unconvincing, then act—or *be*--the madman if need be, and certainly don't discuss doubts.<sup>61</sup> As I wrote 30 years ago: ‘Deterrence theory...seems to be subconsciously informed by the magical

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<sup>60</sup> Cited in *ibid*, p 4

<sup>61</sup> At the beginning of the Vietnam War end-game Richard Nixon famously staged a near-comprehensive nuclear alert, the purpose of which was ‘to “jar” the Soviets and North Vietnamese into making negotiating concessions’. (It didn't work.) See William Burr and Jeffrey Kimball, ‘Nuclear Weapons, the Vietnam War, and the “Nuclear Taboo”’, National Security Archive *Electronic Briefing Book* No. 195, July 31, 2006

notion that not retaliating may retroactively cause the attack that has taken place....'<sup>62</sup> That is where 50 years of strategic studies and nuclear alert have left us—unable to discern or plan for a path back from the brink.

The primrose path to the embrace of deterrence theory (“I *will* kill you, and I mean it: look at my posture”) is paved with a thousand abstractions, euphemisms and elisions as we saw in the musings of the professional nuclear targeteers. For a truly egregious abuse of the strategic studies genre we need go no further than the startling revelation in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* during 2006 that the US hyperpower had quietly and quite likely acquired a 100 per cent effective first nuclear strike capability against Russia.<sup>63</sup> According to its authors the situation has arisen from US advantages in surveillance, readiness, weapon reliability and versatility, et cetera --and post Cold War Russian lags and gaps in these areas, particularly lack of resources (or confidence?) to sustain patrolling by missile-firing submarine and land-mobile missiles. Although professing to deplore this development as destabilizing, it is typical of the strategic mindset that the authors in question completely failed to factor in the costs, the nuclear blowback as it were, to America, let alone the global human, environmental and civilisational costs, of a multi-thousand warhead strike on Russia.<sup>64</sup>

Having a small nuclear arsenal is provocation to and magnet for attack by the comparably armed (assuming they regard the senseless as sensible). This is a deep truth not invalidated by the sinuously defiant maneuverings of North Korea and Iran to achieve or consolidate Bomb status in order to wring concessions from big nuclear powers, who have been hoist with their own nuclear petards. Inflated nuclear arsenals drive proliferation except among a few close allies of the US--Japan and Australia, for instance, who are supposedly enjoying “extended deterrence” and therefore eschewing the nuclear option, while making targets of themselves and accomplices in potential genocide in fact. Vastly smaller or zero weapons after serious nuclear disarmament and de-proliferation would serve everyone much better. In the final analysis having a large nuclear arsenal on permanent alert, being capable of inflicting multiple genocides in minutes, will have to be declared a crime against humanity, and international lawyers would do well to begin drafting the appropriate statutes.

Geopolitical perspectives in nuclear strategy are genocidal perspectives: nuclear strategic studies have proved to be a self-cancelling exercise. The rescue of strategic studies depends on a geo-humanitarian turn in the approach to nuclear disarmament, and the challenge before the Wise Men of Washington and the ICNND is to make a serious beginning on airing *this* perspective while waiting on (and helping to build) a popular global response to the nuclear supreme emergency which faces us all, ignorant or not, ready or not.

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<sup>62</sup> Peter King, *Strategy, Morals and Muddle*, Department of Government, University of Sydney, October 1977, p 49

<sup>63</sup> The paper is KA Lieber and DG Press, ‘The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy’, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006. For a longer, scholarly version see: “The *End of MAD?* The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy.” *International Security*, vol 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006)

<sup>64</sup> Steven Starr and a Russian colleague wrote a powerful rebuttal of the Lieber and Press article, which had created consternation in Moscow; but they had some difficulty finding an American publisher. See Valery Yarynich and Steven Starr, “Nuclear Primacy” is a Fallacy’, *Global Research*, March 4, 2007. For their article in Russian, see *Intelligent.ru*, 25 May 2006.