

The Threat of Nuclear War Grows

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In this Kafkaesque age everything is stood on its head—the champion violator of international law and sovereignty and the territorial integrity of states is gung ho for respecting state sovereignty and territorial integrity (of Georgia, but not Pakistan); primary terrorist and ethnic cleansing states (the United States and Israel) invade, bomb, and torture, but wax indignant at retail terrorism that flows largely in response to their wholesale terror; and these same two states, brimming over with nuclear arms and increasingly threatening to use them, are aghast that Iran might want and someday be able to make a nuclear weapon.

These two states are mainly responsible for the steadily rising probability that nuclear weapons will again be used in the not too distant future. Both have a stock of nuclear weapons and up-to-date delivery systems: that of the United States is of course gigantic, but Israel's is substantial (estimated as between 60 and 200 ready bombs). Israel has developed its nuclear capability outside the authority of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with the collusion of the Western powers, which have been so aggressive in denying any similar rights to Iran (except during the period of the rule of the Western-imposed dictator, the Shah). This weapons accumulation and refusal to accept the NPT has entailed no penalty for Israel—no threats, no sanctions, no refusal to assist its ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Israel has threatened to use its nuclear weapons, earlier against the Soviet Union, today against Iran. Its threat of an attack on Iran, which is in itself a violation of the UN Charter, has not been treated at all critically in the West—in contrast with the horror at Ahmadinejad's fuzzy condemnations of Israel, which have never included any expressed threat to literally attack Israel.

The United States has also steadily violated both the letter and spirit of the NPT. It had agreed in signing on to this treaty in 1968 to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons. Not only has it not done this, it has made them officially a core part of national defense strategy and in recent years has worked steadily to make them more usable in warfare. It has also withdrawn its NPT promise not to use nuclear weapons against any state that signs on to the NPT and promises not to develop nuclear weapons. The United States has also violated the spirit of the NPT by helping and supporting Israel's development of a nuclear weapons capability, of turning a blind eye to Pakistan's nuclear development during years when it was serving as a useful client, and now recently agreeing to assist India's nuclear program despite that country's refusal to join the NPT. Pakistan and China of course resent this U.S. support of a nuclear India, clearly based on political expediency and weakening further any control over nuclear weapons proliferation.

The End of Soviet Nuclear Containment

One important reason for Israel's and the U.S.'s greater openness on the possibility of using nuclear arms is that the countries they threaten, with the exception of Russia, have no

nuclear retaliatory capability. In earlier years the Soviet Union, with its own large nuclear weapons arsenal, was a barrier to nuclear threats, especially to countries which were allied with the Soviets. Its termination diminished the containing force that had previously put some limits on U.S. and Israeli violence.

A country like Iran would surely respond to a nuclear attack, but it couldn't do so with a comparably devastating weapon. The stream of attacks in recent years by the two primary aggressor states has been grounded heavily in the imbalance of power and weakness and limited ability to respond on the part of the victims (Panama, Serbia, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Iraq). A nuclear capability on the part of potential victims would enhance their power of self defense—a terrifying threat to aggressor states.

Russia could respond, but it is substantially weaker in its retaliatory potential than the Soviet Union: it is smaller and militarily less formidable in the wake of its economic disaster of 1992-1998, substantial cutbacks in military expenditures, and national demoralization. It has made some recovery in recent years with higher energy prices and a stronger and more independent government, and the short war with Georgia indicates that it is now prepared to resist the West's (mainly U.S.'s) political and military encirclement and possible attempts at further dismantlement. But it is still vulnerable and justifiably worried about a U.S. first strike capability, enhanced by the planned placement of U.S. anti-missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, with perhaps others to follow. With God-instructed politicians in command in the United States, a manageable (or ignorable) populace, and with its overweening power, aggressive nuclear attack and/or misreadings that set off trigger-alerts are more likely than in the recent past.

Not only are the Russian triggers more alert and sensitive as a U.S. first strike potential and threat grows, Russia has also warned that it is elevating its tactical nuclear weapons to potential use where it is threatened by advanced electronic technology that it cannot match. During the years after 1990, with its devastating economic and political setbacks, it fell further behind the United States in its weaponry, and feels obligated to offset this—or at least talk and threaten to offset this—with the formidable weaponry it still possesses.

Deteriorating Moral Environment

Another important reason for the growing probability of nuclear warfare is the deteriorating moral environment. This has resulted in good part from militarization and war itself, both of which get people habituated to the resort to force and a steady diet of killing, which are normalized. Militarization and war also contribute to justifying the development and use of outlandish weapons, allegedly needed to “defend” the home country and clients from the threat of demonized enemies. Enlightenment values erode and disappear quickly in such a moral environment; mass killing becomes acceptable and even laudable—the large-scale killing of civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the basis of celebration in the United States.

One measure of the deteriorated moral environment is in fact the open acceptance of aggressive war as an appropriate policy option even in the absence of a military attack or serious threat. This was notorious in the case of the 2003 attack on Iraq, and is equally obvious in the case of the ongoing threats to attack Iran. Pugnacity and a willingness—even eagerness—to use force is a political necessity, at least for satisfying the establishment media and major election funders. What the public thinks on this is less clear—the public

usually drags its feet in the war-making process, often preferring diplomacy and reliance on the UN, and has to be managed into a proper frame of mind, although once the bombs start falling patriotic zeal takes over. Writing during World War I, Thorstein Veblen pointed out, that “once a warlike enterprise has been entered upon, it will have the cordial support of popular sentiment even if it is patently an aggressive war.” Furthermore, “The higher the pitch of patriotic fervor, the more tenuous and more threadbare may be the requisite moral sanction. By cumulative excitation some very remarkable results have latterly been attained along this line” (in his chapter “On the Nature and Uses of Patriotism,” in *An Inquiry into the Nature of Peace* [1917]).

The Democrats are deemed by the establishment to be less trustworthy as war-makers than the Republicans—they are supposedly weak on “national security.” This causes their politicians and aspiring political nominees to lean over backwards to demonstrate their bomb-worthiness. For both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama all options were “on the table” in dealing with that gigantic threat that Iran might be able to defend itself some time in the future, and Obama has compensated for his Iraq war foot-dragging by promising an escalation in Afghanistan and maybe Pakistan. He also chose Joe Biden as his running mate, for his “experience” (he’s been wrong lots of times) and known foreign policy pugnacity.

Biden has recently proclaimed that he is a “Zionist,” and in fact virtually every Democratic politician has appeared before AIPAC to pledge allegiance to the state of Israel. This steady genuflection, and the financial dependence of the Democrats on organized Zionist money, has been a further factor in moral degradation. It has completely stymied any political opposition to Israeli ethnic cleansing in Palestine and the war against Lebanon in 2006, and as Israeli leaders wanted the Iraq attack and are eager for a war with Iran, the Democratic Party went along with the Iraq war, dragged its feet in extrication even after the antiwar vote of 2006, and has demonized Iran and helped set the stage for war there.

It has been pointed out by Michael MccGwire that of the two first class global threats, nuclear war and global warming, the first could be eliminated with small costs (actually, its elimination would release large resources for human improvement and welfare), whereas combating global warming will be quite expensive. But eliminating the nuclear warfare threat, and in the process, demilitarizing, would be contrary to the interests of the Pentagon and rest of the military-industrial complex, and those special interests that benefit from or thrive on permanent warfare. At the moment these real special interests are in command. Whether the financial crisis and permanent war setbacks will change the situation and allow a move toward a decent and rational world order remains to be seen.

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