

Growing Dangers of Wars Among Nuclear-Armed States

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When the Cold War ended, it was almost as if the planet itself breathed a huge sigh of relief. People around the world hoped and believed that they had escaped a nuclear holocaust, and largely put nuclear weapons out of their minds.

During the 1980's, fear of nuclear war was by far the most visible issue of concern to the American public. In the early 80's, here at the Livermore Lab, thousands of people rallied and were arrested in nonviolent acts of protest. Yet following the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons – especially U.S. nuclear weapons – fell off the public's radar screen. Nuclear arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament became increasingly isolated issues. "Experts" in Washington, DC redefined post-Cold War nuclear priorities almost solely in terms of securing Russian "loose nukes" and keeping nuclear materials out of the hands of "rogue" states and terrorists.

Meanwhile, deeply embedded in the military-industrial complex, Pentagon planners and scientists at the nuclear weapons labs conjured up new justifications to sustain the nuclear weapons enterprise. Following the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991 Colin Powell, then-Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared: "You've got to step aside from the context we've been using for the past 40 years, that you base [military planning] against a specific threat. We no longer have the luxury of having a threat to plan for. What we plan for is that we're a superpower. We are the major player on the world stage with responsibilities... [and] interests around the world."

Today, more than 15,000 nuclear weapons, most orders of magnitude more powerful than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, 94% held by the U.S. and Russia, continue to pose an intolerable threat to humanity. These are not just "tchotchkes" sitting on a shelf. No disarmament negotiations are underway, and *the dangers of wars among nuclear-armed states are growing*.

The U.S. is poised to spend one trillion dollars over the next 30 years to modernize its nuclear bombs and warheads, the submarines, missiles and bombers needed to deliver them, and the infrastructure to sustain the nuclear enterprise indefinitely.

Russia, China and the other nuclear-armed states are also engaged in nuclear weapons modernization. In the cases of Russia and China, this is partially in response to overwhelming U.S. conventional military superiority and deployment of missile defenses – a concept called "Strategic Stability" which underscores the intrinsic relationship between nuclear and conventional weaponry.

It's unlikely that much progress will be made on nuclear disarmament until there is a significant trend toward demilitarization in general. In 2015 the U.S. spent \$596 billion on

its military, more than twice as much as China and Russia combined, and more than one third of all the world's countries combined.

Last month the British Parliament overwhelmingly voted to replace the UK's four nuclear Trident submarines – its only nuclear weapons system.

Four nuclear submarines carry the U.S.-made Trident ballistic missiles that give the weapons system its collective name and which each have the capacity to deliver up to 12 thermonuclear warheads. The fleet operates out of the naval base at Faslane in Scotland, but also makes use of the U.S. Navy's base at Kings Bay in Georgia. Lockheed Martin Space Systems manufactures the Trident missiles at its factory in Sunnyvale, California.

It was reported in the British press that newly-installed U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May was challenged on her support for the program by a Scottish member of Parliament, who asked: "Are you prepared to authorize a nuclear strike that could kill hundreds of thousands of men, women and children?" May replied with one word: "Yes." Later, our friend, Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn countered that he "would not take a decision that kills millions of innocent people," saying: "I do not believe the threat of mass murder is a legitimate way to go about international relations." This is actually a very accurate definition of "deterrence."

The UK, with an estimated 215 warheads, holds only 1.4% of the world's nuclear warheads.

Last January, The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of its iconic Doomsday Clock to 3 minutes to midnight citing the "extraordinary and undeniable threats to the continued existence of humanity" posed by "unchecked climate change, global nuclear weapons modernizations, and outsized nuclear arsenals," and the failure of world leaders to act.

The U.S. is the only nation with nuclear weapons deployed on foreign soil, with 180 nuclear weapons stationed at six NATO bases in Italy, Germany, Turkey, Belgium and the Netherlands. The recent coup attempt in Turkey raises serious questions about the security of these weapons. An estimated 50 U.S. B-61 bombs are based at Incirlik in Turkey, which also serves as a base for coalition counter-ISIS air operations. The mutineers were able to keep their F-16s in the air only because they were able to refuel them mid-flight using at least one tanker aircraft operated out of Incirlik. Eventually Turkish authorities closed the airspace over Incirlik and cut power to it. The next day, security forces loyal to the government arrested the Turkish commander at the base and other military officers.

In June, the largest NATO war games in decades, involving 31,000 troops – 14,000 of them from the U.S. -- and thousands of vehicles from 24 countries, were conducted in Poland. For the first time since the Nazi invasion of Soviet-occupied Poland began in June 1941, German tanks crossed the country from west to east.

The exercise, named “Anaconda 16”, came just weeks after activation of a U.S. missile defense system in Romania and groundbreaking for another missile defense system in Poland, fueling growing tensions between nuclear-armed giants, the U.S. and Russia.

In April, Russian jets made 20 passes at the USS Donald Cook, passing within 1,000 yards at an altitude of just 100 feet. The American ship was in the Baltic Sea about 70 nautical miles off Kaliningrad.

According to former Defense Secretary William Perry: “The probability of a nuclear calamity is higher today, I believe, than it was during the cold war.”

Over the past year, the U.S. has conducted a series of drop tests of the newly modified B61-12 gravity bomb at the Tonopah test range in Nevada. The Russian Foreign Minister has declared these tests “provocative.” The B61-12 has a “selectable” yield, making it up to four times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. It has a new tail kit which provides precision guidance. This capability, along with the selectable yield, raises concerns that it could be considered more useable. Each new bomb will cost more than twice its weight in solid gold. And of the 480 B61s slated to become B61-12s, approximately 180 will be deployed at the six NATO bases in Europe.

Today, in Syria, the U.S., Russia and France - three nuclear-armed nations – are bombing side-by-side and on different sides. The U.S. and Russia, the two major nuclear powers, are facing off in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. An accidental or intentional military incident could send the world spiraling into a disastrous nuclear confrontation. Recent bombing attacks on neutral hospitals remind us that in the chaos of war such mistakes are all too common.

Adding to the potential conflicts among nuclear-armed states, the U.S. and China are facing off against each other in the seas bordering China, where other Asian nations are contesting Chinese territorial claims. Meanwhile China and Russia have announced plans to deepen military cooperation and increase the number of joint military exercises in 2016 – potentially as a counter-balance to NATO.

On January 6, North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test (claiming it was an H-bomb). On January 10, the United States deployed a B-52 bomber capable of carrying nuclear weapons on a low-level flight over its ally South Korea in a show of force following North Korea's nuclear test.

In January of this year, The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists issued a dire warning to leaders and citizens of the world, that it is still three minutes to midnight, stating that:

“Three minutes is too close. Far too close. We... want to be clear about our decision not to move the hands of the Doomsday Clock in 2016: That decision is not good news, but an

expression of dismay that world leaders continue to fail to focus their efforts and the world's attention on reducing the extreme danger posed by nuclear weapons and climate change. When we call these dangers existential, that is exactly what we mean: They threaten the very existence of civilization and therefore should be the first order of business for leaders who care about their constituents and their countries.”

Donald Trump's rhetoric on nuclear weapons is all over the place (like most of his rhetoric). But Tony Schwartz, the ghostwriter of Trump's 1987 memoir, "The Art of the Deal", says in the July 26 issue of The New Yorker: "*I genuinely believe that if Trump wins and gets the nuclear codes there is an excellent possibility it will lead to the end of civilization.*"

In 2009, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that while pursuing the long-term vision of nuclear disarmament, "the United States must maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal to deter any adversary and guarantee the defense of our allies and partners." And to that end, "until we reach that point of the horizon where the last nuclear weapon has been eliminated, we need to reinforce the domestic consensus that America will maintain the nuclear infrastructure needed to sustain a safe and effective deterrent..." In 2010 she clarified what she meant by long-term when she endorsed the "goal of a world someday, *in some century*, free of nuclear weapons."

On July 8, Senator Tim Kaine was one of 14 Senators who signed a letter to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, calling on the Department of Defense to shore up its commitment to modernization of all three legs of the "strategic triad". Presidential candidate Clinton subsequently named Senator Kaine as her Vice-Presidential running mate.

No matter who our next President is, our work is cut out for us.