Why Nuclear Weapons, and Arms Control, Still Matter

The entire world is modernizing its nuclear weapons and delivery arsenals, but few Americans know that the danger of annihilation by them is slowly increasing. We are preoccupied by daily tweets from the President and a hundred other issues that dominate the news like climate change, and sporting scores.

The US and Russia still possess over 85% of nuclear arsenals, and either alone could wipe out civilization several times over. But the arms control regime that brought some stability to this balance of terror is slowly unravelling. Even a “small” nuclear war between India and Pakistan could result in a “nuclear winter” killing billions far away from collapse of agricultural systems. Even one nuclear warhead, given or sold to Islamic terrorists by Pakistan or North Korea, could trigger a global holocaust if detonated in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. So the Israelis are also buying nuclear capable submarines, and improving other delivery systems for their undeclared nuclear arsenal, so they can strike at anyone, anytime, worldwide. Meanwhile China rises, developing a new, multi-warhead, Dongfeng-41, land-based, long-range nuclear missile. See: “New Challenges in Nuclear Arms Control” at, http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse232-EN.pdf

None of those other countries abides by the cornerstone nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) signed by most nuclear powers in 1969. It has critical mechanisms for international monitoring and verification of nuclear systems. In June of 2002, the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty of 1970 to deploy rudimentary missile defense systems, which threaten Russia and China in particular. Russia currently violates another key treaty, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty of 1987, and China has never agreed to restraints on its many short, middle and long-range missile systems. So in October the President declared his intention to withdraw from the INF treaty soon, believing like a child that the only thing which really matters is the size of one’s nuclear “button.” See: https://thebulletin.org/2018/10/trump-falls-on-sword-for-putins-treaty-violation/?utm_source=Bulletin%20Newsletter&utm_medium=iContact%20email&utm_campaign=November2

Our weapons industry now plans to consume one to three trillion dollars to modernize all three legs of the US nuclear “triad” while Russia develops a new “Sarmat” heavy missile to replace its aging SS-18 “Satans.” Those can already kill three of Minnesota’s five million people in minutes. One SS-18 could do that today, but they have dozens, and both sides have many other ways to deliver thousands of nuclear weapons to any spot on earth.

This is why the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize went to ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) http://www.icanw.org/. This is why even former US Secretaries of Defense like William Perry and Secretaries of State like George Schultz support efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons. This is why former US Presidents like Jimmy Carter and Barak Obama
support such efforts rhetorically even while authorizing trillion + dollar nuclear modernization programs to appease a militant Congress (and that weapons industry Eisenhower warned about). This is also why the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved its doomsday clock to 2 minutes to midnight on Jan. 26, 2017.

But most of America sleeps, numbed by the best entertainment industry ever created, or mesmerized by the daily circus and horror show we call politics today. There are, of course, hundreds of other worthy causes begging for attention, like healthcare, decaying infrastructure, Russian election meddling, destruction of the living system that supports us all, and waves of migration from failing states. Each of those waves are composed of desperate people and families that deserve compassionate attention, even though they frighten others and polarize politics worldwide. Nuclear weapons threaten everything, and everybody, every day.

So, with all respect due to many other worthy, life and death causes, I urge my fellow citizens to WAKE UP and attend to the monster of our own making. If we wait long enough, those nuclear weapons will be used. Every other weapon built has eventually been used, and there are more hands on more buttons today, not all of which are responsible or even rational. The day after, it will not matter who pushed the first button, or how big their button was.

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689 words inclusive, with links.