



Clausewitz on Warheads

By Mark Stout

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The disordered fruits of the arms control hothouse are again in full-bloom. Although fallow for a period, we have now entered an era of sustained media encouragement to *finally* rid the world of nuclear weapons. The effort appears to be gaining some traction, given the recent presidential speech advocating a world without nuclear weapons. America's desire for a nuclear-bomb free world dates to 1945 and is certainly emotionally appealing. Then again, so is a world without death or taxes.

While Napoleonic-era military writer Carl Von Clausewitz's specific thoughts on nuclear arms are not available, his ideas relating to the subject are easily enough derived. Clausewitz is well-known in the military community for his writings on war-making, but he is perhaps best associated with the policy observation that "war is a continuation of politics by other means." Clausewitz viewed war as a part of the unending quest for power in an inherently unsafe world. As such, the acquisition of nuclear weapons and missiles, for example, whether by North Korea, or Iran--is recognizable as both a pursuit of power and a continuation of national policies. Disarmament is also a continuation of policy.

Realism--which Clausewitz adhered to--would postulate North Korea, Pakistan, India, and Israel are not going to give up their nuclear weapons. Why? Because possessing nuclear weapons provides stature as nations to be reckoned with. Similarly, their security is enhanced with nuclear weapons per the Clausewitzian concept of mass, which in part 'provides the effect of overwhelming combat power.' When Iran finalizes their nuclear capabilities, they too will be disinclined to forgo their nuclear weapons. Neither these nations, nor any others, can compete toe-to-toe with the U.S. military, but they can greatly constrain our freedom of action and hold us at risk with a nuclear inventory and delivery mechanisms.

Clausewitz observed nations tend to act in their political leadership's own best interests. Evidence of this can be seen in the North Korean and Iranian "peaceful" nuclear-power programs, which have directly enabled nuclear weapons programs. This -- and a proximity to Iran -- may explain why a number of nations (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and others) are now highly interested in nuclear-energy.

Idealism--realism's more well-mannered cousin--tends to be characterized by favoring collective security (international agencies, like the UN, NATO, and others), including arms control agreements. But, if history is a lesson, disarmament agreements do not necessarily increase national or global security, nor do they automatically yield non-proliferation. For example,

India, Israel, and Pakistan simply haven't signed the NPT. North Korea had, but violated the treaty and has since withdrawn. Iran is a current signatory, but serious people say they are in violation of the NPT. Does idealism work? Regularly it does not. Consider that the longbow, aerial bombardment, and even war itself have all been outlawed at one point or another.

As the long-forgotten translator of Clausewitz's famous work *On War*, Colonel F.N. Maude postulated "peace is maintained by the equilibrium of forces, and will continue just as long as this equilibrium exists, and no longer." Translated into post-modern language, one might say "when nuclear weapons are outlawed, only outlaws will have nuclear weapons."

Will other nuclear players be amicable to some nuclear weapons cuts? Almost certainly. Britain appears ready, and Russia loves nuclear arms control. For Russia, there are a couple of reasons: one, they can't afford to sustain or modernize their large inventory as it is, and it also provides them the rare opportunity to be viewed as a U.S. peer. However, the major nuclear nations are nations are modernizing their nuclear weapons and delivery systems, with one exception--the U.S.

Once the U.S. completes its Nuclear Posture Review later this year, we too *may* be ready for reductions, especially if we can improve our vinyl-era nuclear weapons stockpile. But figuring out how the weapons will be used to maintain deterrence, to include how many nuclear weapons are needed, what their targets are, and how they will be delivered, tested, maintained, sustained, and modernized, is essential. The number of nuclear weapons proposed normally tends to be an unexamined round number of significance (often 1,000) which apparently "sounds about right."

Until more devastating weapons comes along (or a way to nullify the effects of a nuclear weapon), nation-states will continue to develop, possess, and improve nuclear weapons, and yes, terrorists will covet them. While the idea of eliminating the world's nuclear weapons inventory appears to be ruling the day, consider these respective lessons from both the time-space continuum and history: you can't unring the bell and you can't uninvent the bomb. The charitable description of a world free of nuclear weapons is "idealistic." Clausewitz, in a less generous depiction, would probably say "unserious."

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