



A Nuclear Apologist on the Nuclear Atheists

By
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Perhaps you've heard from the Harvard Business Review or some other such weighty source that "the best way to predict the future is to create it." Such advice sounds great until you consider that failure is a startlingly common outcome associated with creation. For example, about half of all new businesses fail within five years despite the fact all were no doubt constructed to create better futures for their proprietors and seemed like a good idea at the time. Yes, reality can have a way of intruding on the best laid plans. Consider, for example, the bold and innovative organic jelly fish farmer. When it turns out there's no market for organic jelly fish, all the farmer's attempts to 'create the future' have been a waste of time and money.

I bring the 'create the future' concept forward as a point of departure to discuss those who want to 'create' a world without nuclear weapons. As with organic jelly fish farming, while theoretically do-able, a world without nuclear weapons requires you to suspend your belief in some historically grounded and self-evident obstacles which will be unpacked in short order. Those who would attempt to create a world without nuclear weapons are individuals and organizations who can be described as nuclear atheists and are epitomized by the kind of thinking seen in the article *Reaching Zero*.

They are nuclear atheists, not because they don't believe in the existence of such weapons, but rather because they do not believe there is a security *value* or *usefulness* associated with nuclear weapons. This position asserts that the existence (not the use, the existence) of nuclear weapons is effectively a global suicide pact. Unfortunately, the nuclear atheists' arguments seem to assume what they purport to prove.

Acknowledged or not, the nuclear atheists, in advocating for a world without nuclear weapons, believes in an ahistorical humanity that would today require the creation of 1) cheat-free universal and simultaneous nuclear disarming enabled by 2) an inviolate and enduringly unified international community which would 3) effectively uninvent the past by controlling the knowledge and manufacturing skills needed to create nuclear weapons.

The past instead shows us that cheating does occur, whether it is simultaneous or unsynchronized, individual or institutional, or whether it regards trade or treaties. Next, the phrase 'enduringly unified international community' is itself an amusing, but ultimately useless, oxymoron. Finally, *nothing* has ever been uninvented. Together, this means the future proposed

by the nuclear atheists for a world without nuclear weapons is beyond implausible. In keeping with the deity theme, a world without nuclear weapons will only happen when the lion lies down with the lamb.

The nuclear atheists--who are sometimes referred to as global zeros or nuclear abolitionists--look at the world largely by contrasting the bygone Cold War with our current post-Cold War environment. Some nuclear atheists even grudgingly accept that since the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons which threatened America's existence, then the U.S. needed similar weapons. But the fall-back is often 'but we're not in the 1950s anymore.' Well no kidding--we're not even in 2009 anymore.

Of course the Cold War has passed and nuclear apologists--those who feel nuclear weapons can add to U.S. national security and global stability--as well as nuclear atheists know it. Nuclear proliferation is now the issue de jour and the challenge is to address *exactly* what to do next. This is because there are now more nuclear states--and more states interested in becoming nuclear states--than there have ever been.

Nuclear atheists see the United States' superior conventional capabilities and use of those capabilities as part of their argument for eliminating U.S. nuclear weapons. However, this Western-focused worldview ignores the reality that our *conventional* superiority--versus our nuclear superiority--is what makes others covet nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are inherently asymmetrical, so unless a nation falls under U.S.-provided security, they will be very highly valued by nuclear have-nots. The lessons some learned from the first and second Gulf Wars were those of *two-way* nuclear deterrence: being nuclear could well keep you from having to fight the U.S. or its allies conventionally. The 'peace and security' Iraq twice 'gained' by not having nuclear weapons instead destined them to full-on and unambiguous conventional defeat.

The nuclear atheists often fall back on the intellectual efforts presented by Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Sam Nunn and Bill Perry. However in January 2010, these four offered that while international cooperation to prevent proliferation or a loss of nuclear materials is exceedingly important, "Providing for this nation's defense will always take precedence over all other priorities." This is where the nuclear atheists are most disconnected: they have a goal but no reasonable strategy or plan of action to take them to their endstate. Goals minus strategy equal fantasy and fantasy tends to make for lousy national security.

Statesmen like Kissinger, Shultz, Nunn, and Perry have a preeminent goal of sustaining or enhancing the nation's security and nuclear deterrence will be a part of the equation for decades, and if former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger is correct, perhaps for perpetuity. The nuclear atheists say Schlesinger, reflect "...a combination of American utopianism and American parochialism...[which is]...not based upon an understanding of reality."

Is there any irony in the fact that nuclear atheists depend on a *whole series* of miracles to achieve a world without nuclear weapons? The nuclear atheists would be better served by reconsidering historical events, quitting their attempts to create a crisis where none exists (arms control with Russia), and paying more attention to the one that does exist (Iran). And as for me,

I am a nuclear apologetic (and even a nuclear reductionist) who will work to create a world without reality television, another of life's great oxymorons.

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