

The future of weapons of mass destruction and rogue states

Renfrew Christie

By many orders of magnitude, nuclear weapons are more important than other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

For example, consider the case of anthrax as a weapon. The United States Department of Defence (DoD) (2006) recently announced that it is resuming its mandatory vaccination of large numbers of troops against anthrax. The SANDF should therefore make its own preparations against possible anthrax warfare. But the US DoD (2006) noted that during the 2001 anthrax attacks there were only 22 cases and five people died.

In a much larger attack, as many as a thousand or even ten thousand might die from anthrax. However, the numbers of possible anthrax deaths will always be smaller than they would be if just one small nuclear weapon exploded in a city. The same applies to all other weapons of mass destruction: they are not in the same league as nuclear weapons. The rest of this paper will therefore focus on nuclear weapons.

There were over 137 000 nuclear warheads in existence at the end of the Cold War. The US numbers peaked at 32 500 warheads in 1967, having a combined TNT equivalent of 20 500 million tons (Hutchinson 2003:125).

For ease of calculation call it 21 000 million tons. A ton is a million grams. A gram of TNT on the sternum or the jugular is enough to kill a person. So in 1967 there was enough explosive in the American arsenal alone to kill twenty-one thousand million million people. But there were only three thousand million people on earth in 1967. So the Americans could notionally have killed every person on earth seven million times in 1967. The Soviet Union probably had an even bigger megatonnage then.

Today things are much better. We are at peace. In January 2000 the total explosive equivalent available to the known powers was 12 838 megatons (Hutchinson 2003:125), enough notionally to kill twelve thousand million people. There were by then only six thousand million people on earth. So by the year 2000 we could only kill every human on earth two million times. This is a great step forward for humankind. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Nor is explosive death the whole nuclear story. Nuclear weapons are massively poisonous. They kill by radiation. Consider the town of Pripyat next to the Chernobyl reactor. It was a smart, well-built new town for a quarter of a million people. Nobody lives there any more; nor anywhere for 150 km downwind of the doomed reactor (Anonymous 2004). Gigaton-range nuclear warfare has the ability to poison at least over half a continent in the same way (Robbins et al 1991). Worse still, such a war could put a cloud over the entire northern hemisphere, cause a new ice age and kill most or all of humanity that way too.

You could be exploded, or incinerated, or irradiated, or asphyxiated, or frozen to death by nuclear weapons, or an electro-magnetic pulse could stop your pacemaker, or a dud bomb could fall on your head and crush you. Nuclear weapons provide abundant ways of killing a person. To put it bluntly, the existing nuclear weapons in the hands of the civilised powers could end life on earth – all of it.

Nuclear weapons are thus not like other weapons. Speak not of them in the same breath; plan differently for them. The remarkable nuclear historian, Beatrice Heuser (2000:23) argues as follows:

It is not accidental that weapons of mass destruction have been invented in an unprecedented period in human history, where population growth, and strife for ever scarcer basic resources, might well be the cause for cataclysmic wars in the twenty first century. Whether or not these will become catastrophes involving the use of weapons of mass destruction depends very much on whether all societies of this world not only can adapt but will adapt to the destructive potential of such weapons by embracing the belief that a war which might lead to the use of such weapons cannot benefit them in any way.

She goes on:

If our conviction that a 'mutation' of attitudes must take place, and that we must collectively learn this lesson, fails to persuade all cultures of this world and all fanatical sects, cults and the last person with access to a biological and chemicals laboratory, weapons of mass destruction could yet become a turning point, indeed a final point of human history in a catastrophe beyond our imagination.

Of course, one person's 'fanatical cult or sect' is another person's mother and father. The grass is always more fanatical on the other side of the fence. It took an upstanding democratic Christian man, Harry Truman, one of America's finest presidents in anyone's book, to use two nuclear weapons on the human beings in two cities. Fanaticism is not essential to nuclear warfare, but as Heuser intimates, fanaticism, however defined, may help us to our doom.

When as sober and as deeply read a historian as Beatrice Heuser uses the words 'catastrophe beyond our imagination', believe her! I read once that the only extra resource that the United States stockpiled for use after nuclear war, compared with its normal emergency preparations, was 90 tons of opium, with which to make morphine to numb the pain of the dying. They may yet need it.

Be that as it may, nuclear weapons have become smaller and easier to make. The techniques are well known. A teenager of little brain may download them from the Internet. Such weapons are currently well within the easy reach of any industrial state. Only the difficulty of acquiring fissile material and the willpower of the guardians prevents non-state actors from obtaining nuclear devices – but this can only be a matter of time.

Nuclear weapons have proliferated beyond the original powers. North Korea has enough material for half a dozen weapons and has fired one (China Daily 2006); more may come (Carnegie 2006). The United States now has some 8 000 warheads; Russia 5 000; France 350; China 250; the United Kingdom 200 for submarine launch; India perhaps 100; Pakistan 50; and Israel is believed to be a nuclear power (The Telegraph 2006).

In addition, other states have gone down part of or the entire road to becoming a nuclear power. At least Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Iraq, Libya, South Africa, Sweden, Spain, some smaller states of the ex-Soviet Union and Switzerland have all had nuclear weapons or have conducted advanced work in this regard. They are all said to have turned back;

some have actually given up the bomb. Of course, even a stopped donkey can be re-started.

Germany and Japan continue to hold some five tons of plutonium each. Martin Walker (2006) writes, 'Japan has long been reckoned to be a few weeks away from a nuclear weapon'. Germany is the same.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty may be read as the peace treaty of the Second World War, signed 25 years later. Essentially it prohibits the losers of that war, Japan and Germany, from owning nuclear weapons. It permits the major winners of that war to own nuclear weapons. It prohibits all other signatories from owning nuclear weapons. There are countries that did not sign, such as India and Israel.

Yet the treaty does not prohibit Japan and Germany from housing other countries' nuclear weapons! Both Japan and Germany have been sites of massive nuclear weapon stockpiles for decades, for use in their defence, so the idea that they are not nuclear powers is absurd.

Japan religiously pretends to keep her nuclear virginity because of the unquestioned deep trauma at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An editorial in *The Japan Times* (2006) asks, 'How can Japan, the only country to suffer from atomic bombings, persuade other nations to give up nuclear weapons if it goes for a nuclear option itself?' Yet patently she is no virgin. Japan is covered in thousands of nuclear weapons for her defence.

Similarly, by what stretch of the imagination is Turkey not counted as a nuclear power? It has been defended by American nuclear weapons *on its own soil* for decades. Japan, Germany and Turkey are nuclear powers and so is every state that harbours another country's weapons. Moreover, it is quite possible for one power to keep nuclear weapons secretly for another power. This may well have occurred several times.

In short: we do not know how many nuclear powers there are, in the sense that they own or harbour nuclear weapons.

Further, there is no such thing as a 'nuclear-free' Africa (OAU nd), or a 'nuclear-free' Korean peninsular (Cincotta 2006), or a 'nuclear-free' Hout Bay or a 'nuclear-free' anywhere else. There is no spot on land, or in the sea, or even on the dark side of the moon, that cannot be targeted by nuclear weapons, right now.

The idea that there could now be a 'nuclear-free zone', anywhere on earth, belongs in a kindergarten or a place of asylum.

Moreover, nuclear weapons are not fixed property. They are *movable*, very quickly. Any state on earth could host another's nuclear weapons

within 24 hours. China could make Lesotho effectively a nuclear power tomorrow by basing Chinese weapons in Maseru. China could even give ownership of nuclear weapons to the Lesotho Defence Force tomorrow. If anyone says 'nuclear-free zone' to you, sing the old liberation song, 'Bring me my straitjacket'.

The treaty permits the five largest victors of World War II, America, Britain, France, Russia and China, to own nuclear weapons and to base them in any other states. It does not permit any other country to be a nuclear-owning power itself, however. The trade-off for this was that any state signatory to the treaty had the right to go the full nuclear fuel cycle for the peaceful use of atomic energy for electricity generation and for other nuclear research.

The problem with this trade-off is that India's first bomb test was for 'peaceful' purposes by a state supposedly beloved of peace. South Africa's fuel-cycle research was supposedly 'peaceful' and by deep duplicity well known to the West at the time it produced nuclear weapons.

Iran is an energy-rich country, which flares trillions of BTUs of unneeded natural gas from oil wells. Iran thus wastes energy in stunning quantities. Iran therefore has not the slightest need for electricity from nuclear power stations. Yet, under the protection of the treaty, Iran pretends to be researching peaceful nuclear energy when it is patently driving for nuclear weapons status.

The treaty allows countries to pretend peace but to build weapons of Armageddon.

A child can see that the clothes are missing from many would-be nuclear emperors; yet the diplomatic community continues to have endless solemn debates as if there could be such a thing as a 'peaceful' nuclear fuel cycle.

In working-class Cape Town, or in Glasgow, or in any other knife capital, a magistrate has no difficulty in rejecting the excuse that a 12 inch knife found on a teenager was intended to carve the family roast. What is it about the world's undoubtedly better-educated diplomats that they cannot see the nukes for the freeze?

The nuclear powers claim to have partly fulfilled their half of the bargain by reducing their numbers of warheads in service. However, the arithmetic is spoiled by the question of whether their reserve nuclear material may quickly become warheads and may be used.

In any event it is obvious to a pre-teen that the nuclear powers actually reduced their warhead numbers because the Cold War ended,

not because of the treaty, and that they would rapidly rebuild their stocks as soon as they felt sufficiently threatened.

The fact of the matter is that the nuclear powers have based fission and fusion weapons in dozens of states throughout the Cold War and they still do. Moreover, every nuclear power has also proliferated nuclear weapons and their technology. They have done so, whether 'illegally' by entrepreneurs 'earning a hard-won buck' or intentionally by transfers to close allies, or both.

No country has ever made a nuclear bomb all by itself. Israel did not get nuclear status by itself, nor did South Africa, nor did North Korea, nor did India, nor did Pakistan, nor China, France, the UK or the Soviet Union. Not even the USA got to be a nuclear power by itself. The only country capable of taking nuclear status by itself might be the Vatican, yet that presumes divine intervention.

The proliferators must be presumed to have known what they were doing because they are, after all, educated grown-ups. For example, China sold partly-enriched uranium to apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. It cannot be said that the Chinese did not *know* what it would be used for.

Every power that owns nuclear weapons has passed on secrets and/or physical technology and/or fissile material and/or weaponeers and/or documents. Moreover, a host of other countries have sold or given help to proliferators.

For example, in the very week of the North Korean bomb test, virginal Japan indicted Mitutoyo Corporation for exporting to Malaysia and Singapore precision instruments that could help to produce uranium enrichment centrifuges. The company pleaded guilty. For whatever reason, the usually efficient Japanese state had not prevented proliferation. In addition, the corporation was suspected of exporting similar equipment to a company connected with Iran's nuclear programme (Kyodo News 2006).

Of course, there must very often be a huge price premium that secret nuclear aspirants will pay for such equipment, so the selling companies and states must be presumed to know the real purpose of the machinery. But they turn a blind eye; they take the money; and they *knowingly* proliferate.

The role of Norway in proliferation by selling heavy water is obvious. Canada's sale of Candu reactors to India helped the Indian bomb. You mean Canada didn't *know*?

Norway must have known. Norway's greatest heroes of the Second World War were famous for attacking a heavy water plant in order to stop the Nazi bomb programme (Haukeld 1954). The children's war comics of the 1950s knew the nuclear weapons' purpose of heavy water. Yet a *Staat Sekretar* of Norway once said outright to me that Norway *really* did not expect Israel to use heavy water for a bomb. Really?

The puzzle for nuclear historians is not how, when or why the bomb spread. A theoretical basis in 'real-politik' and in 'real-economik' is all that is needed to understand that. The bomb spread because states wanted to arm their allies. The bomb also spread because forbidden fruit generates super-profits. A six-year-old can understand these reasons.

The puzzle (and it is a truly deep one) is how so many grown-up peace negotiators and diplomats persuaded themselves and the world that their treaties had meaning; that there could be 'peaceful nuclear fuel cycles'; that there could be 'nuclear-free zones'; that every country that took the bomb 'did so unaided'; and, to quote Helmoed Heitman in a different context, that 'there are fairies at the bottom of the garden'.

An army writing plans for the year 2020 cannot do any of this. An army cannot afford to be as blind as a diplomat. An army must expect and prepare for more nuclear warfare in the twenty-first century. An army must expect and prepare for continued and rapidly expanding nuclear proliferation involving many more states and non-state actors. Put your faith in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and die an awful, undefended death.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty was always a paper tiger anyway, because of Article X, which enables any state to withdraw at three months' notice: 'Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardised the supreme interests of its country.'

In other words every state signatory has said it reserves the right to proliferate nuclear weapons as soon as its supreme interests have been endangered. 'Mommy, I swear by all that is holy to remain a virgin until Satan or the boy next door leads me into temptation.' Germany has sworn this; Japan has sworn this; purist South Africa has sworn this. Some treaty: 'We will not take the Bomb unless we decide to take the Bomb'.

The very man whose job it is above all others to implement the treaty says in monosyllables that it is useless. Mohammed ElBaradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA),

said in October 2006 that the 'knowledge is out of the tube for peaceful purposes and unfortunately for non-peaceful purposes'. He said there are 'virtual nuclear weapons states'; there is nuclear trafficking; 'there are a lot of temptations' to seek nuclear weapons. The IAEA has a budget of US\$120 million to stop proliferation. 'A drop in the ocean: we don't have the financial resources to be independent and we still don't have laboratories in Vienna' (Stoullig 2006).

ElBaradei went on, saying that:

We need to develop a new system of international approach, or we will not end up with nine nuclear weapons states only but with another 20 or 30 states which have the capacity to develop nuclear weapons in a short time. (Stoullig 2006)

If the watchdog himself announces that he has no teeth, none can be secure; none can sleep safely in their beds at night.

The problem, of course, is that Article X of the treaty is a tripwire that is meant to deter states from going nuclear. Ring the bells and the international community will punish you, by force if necessary. But what if some state calls the bluff and no punishment results? North Korea has done this without effective international punishment.

Before the North Korean nuclear bomb test, John Bolton, US Ambassador to the UN, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were dire in their warnings about what Secretary Rice said would be 'a very provocative act'. Japan's Prime Minister said that 'Japan and the world absolutely will not tolerate a nuclear test: the international community will respond harshly' (Sanger 2006). He was proved completely wrong.

After the test, the United States accepted a tame Security Council resolution. This did not even mention the key Article VII of the United Nations Charter, which opens the possibility of the use of force as a response if sanctions fail (Kosyrev 2006). The actual sanctions meant little: 'Both China and South Korea indicated that business and economic relations would largely be unaffected' (Onishi 2006).

In short, the United States backed down and started making threats about what would happen if North Korea tested a *second* bomb. 'We agreed that in case it happens there should be more grave consequences,' said Ms Rice and her South Korean counterpart (Agence France-Presse 2006).

A Russian commentator wrote, 'The international community has brandished the stick once too often. The war against Iraq has shown

North Korea that having the bomb, even in international isolation, is safer than negotiating with those that have the stick' (Kosyrev 2006).

A better analysis may be that China refused to stop its pawn from going nuclear. As Shi Yihong, an international relations expert at the People's University in Beijing put it, 'It is useless to try to persuade the United States to remain calm, unless China puts pressure on the United States' (Smith 2006).

Two weeks before the closely contested American mid-term elections, it is plain that even the George W Bush administration had no option but to back down to Chinese pressure. Of course, it is just possible that the administration was biding its time until after the elections, while giving North Korea enough rope to hang itself by further tests.

That China had the power to stop North Korea's first test, if it wanted to, is made plain by the threats from China against a second test. 'North Korea's nuclear test touched China's warning line', said the *People's Daily*. 'If North Korea doesn't cease from behaviour that might worsen the situation, China might stop providing grain and oil to North Korea.' (Spencer 2006)

This is a frank admission that China's 'warning line' came *after* the firing of the first bomb, which showed the world that China's cat's paw is a nuclear power. We may deduce that China therefore wanted North Korea to take the bomb and permitted it. If this were not true, China would have threatened to cut the oil and the grain supplies before the first test.

There is no reason why one state should own a nuclear weapon and another should not, unless the pure position is adopted that none should. In practice, powers have pretended to oppose all proliferation but have actually proliferated to their allies; or at the very least have not noticed when their allies took the bomb.

For example, the West turned a blind eye to the apartheid nuclear weapons and the Israeli bombs, which puts them in an awkward position when they want action against new nuclear states of which they disapprove. Those who seek to have their cake and eat it must live (or die) with the consequences.

On the day of the first North Korean test, *The New York Times* (2006) wrote, 'Let us all agree: North Korea's government is too erratic, too brutal, and too willing to sell what it has built to have a nuclear bomb'. How was the apartheid state different, when the newspaper turned a blind eye?

Be that as it may, the only state with the ability to stop North Korea, short of all-out war, was China. And by inaction China has now ensured that North Korea is a nuclear weapons-owning state.

This is not a process that will stop soon. Debate is raging in Japan about whether to take the bomb openly (Johnston 2006). The United States is promising that it 'will use the full range of its military might in defence of Japan against North Korea' (Millikin nd).

But the United States did nothing when North Korea left the treaty; did nothing when North Korea fired its long-range missile; and now did nothing effective when North Korea ignited its bomb.

How then can Japan believe that the United States will go to world nuclear war, risking its own cities, if North Korea explodes a nuclear weapon in Hiroshima? It cannot.

The implacable logic is that of dominoes, to coin a phrase. As each new state is allowed to go nuclear, others are sure to follow. 'And everywhere that Mary went, the lambs were sure to go!'

ElBaradei has warned of 20 or 30 more states. The reality may be double that, because there are so many industrially capable countries. Some 60 states could acquire nuclear weapons fairly fast and easily.

Non-state actors want nuclear weapons, no doubt, and would find them asymmetrically advantageous. An individual or small group that keeps itself secret has no obvious city on which nuclear reprisals might fall. There is no mutually assured destruction. For this reason a non-state actor with the bomb is more likely to use it.

The world is suddenly an even scarier place than it was at the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless it must be said in the crispest terms: *South Africa has not the slightest need of nuclear weapons now.*

We face no immediate nuclear threat other than the general threat of world annihilation with which we have lived since the dawn of the nuclear age. We have no reason now to make bombs. The moral advantage of having given them up outweighs any value they might have in the short term.

But all states must be treated as rogue states in the current international anarchy. There is no international order. There is no willingness to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. South Africa must retain its right under Article X to take nuclear weapons if need be. It must keep up to date in the technology, if only so that it maintains excellent 24/7/365 intelligence about possible nuclear threats from state or non-state actors.

Under what circumstances might South Africa actually build another nuclear weapon? If 60 states took the bomb, would we do so? If there

were 120 countries owning nuclear weapons, would we follow suit? Article X of the treaty makes that possible.

Hypothetically, if Adolf Hitler were to have married Hendrik Verwoerd, and their daughter married Idi Amin, and their daughter became president for life of a rich African state to the north, which became a nuclear power, South Africa would take the bomb.

In conclusion, more nuclear warfare is probable, the longer the rope one gives humankind. South Africa must be energetic in the prevention of nuclear war multilaterally; yet it must keep its potential nuclear powder dry, as an option of last resort under Article X of the treaty that it signed.

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