2001

The Nuclear Turning Point: A Blueprint for Deep Cuts and Dilevering of Nuclear Weapons,

Hank Chiles

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol54/iss1/17

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.
These examples underscore the challenges involved in postmodern military missions, and they may support the arguments of those who believe it is dangerous, if not impossible, to expect war-fighting troops to conduct “other than war” missions.

The limitation of this collection of essays is that it does not address the militaries of greatest interest to American military officers—those of potential adversaries to the United States. Because the editors are specifically proposing a theoretical model of how Western, democratic militaries are adjusting to a world with a dramatically reduced conventional threat, the reader must look elsewhere to discover whether or not such nations as China are experiencing the same trends.

Yet there is a great deal here to challenge those worried about the state of America’s military today, especially concerning social issues. One of the most interesting insights concerns the levels of integration of women and homosexuals in the American military, compared with the other countries surveyed. The case studies show that the United States is farther along than most in integrating women but lags behind the postmodern norm in allowing open homosexuals into its ranks.

The essay on Israel, for example, points out that the common perception of the “woman warrior” in the Israeli Defense Force is a myth. Although many women played active fighting roles in the Israeli war of independence, women today are less fully integrated into the IDF than in most other Western militaries.

On the subject of homosexuals, the success of Canada is cited as a possible guide for other nations. Homosexuals have been able to serve openly in the Canadian Forces since 1992, and the removal of previous restrictions is described as having had “virtually no negative impact” on such matters as recruitment, retention, and morale. It is not clear if the Canadian experience is directly applicable to the United States, but the book suggests that perhaps it is. One of the editors writes that “if the full acceptance of openly homosexual service members is only a matter of time, given the increased tolerance for diversity of sexual orientation among the general population, it would be advisable for policy makers in countries where this is true to move beyond wishful thinking or abhorrence and consider how such a transition can be made with minimal negative impact on group cohesion and military effectiveness.”

Of course, case studies from other countries may do little to persuade those who have already made up their minds. The decision of Canadian Forces authorities in 1998 to approve financial support for a service member’s sex-change operation, for example, may provide ammunition for both sides in that particular debate. Whether or not the Canadian example is one to be feared or applauded, it does suggest how important it is to study closely the development of the postmodern military.

ERIK DAHL
Commander, U.S. Navy
Naval War College


Ah, ecstasy! A benign world for the next two decades. Power politics disappear. America leads the drawdown, with Russia following to achieve parity with China, Britain, and France at about two hundred nuclear weapons. Worldwide nuclear
verification becomes practically perfect. Permanent members of the UN Security Council agreeably limit their vetoes. It is all here in this book, the product of the “Deep Cuts Study Group.”

The authors make no secret of their advocacy for drastic nuclear weapons reductions by the United States and Russia, the dealerting or deactivating of all weapons to preclude launch on warning, and announcements of no-first-use policies. The thesis depends on extraordinary verification beyond today’s technology, open sharing of weapons storage data, ironclad control of fissile material, and an effective worldwide security system. An actual nuclear war with Russia is considered unthinkable, despite significant nuclear capability in that country; although Russia now makes no bones about its dependence on nuclear weapons, the authors believe intentions can change. The authors reject nuclear supremacy and deterrence for the unknown of utopian equality.

On the other hand, this book espouses a number of valid premises. “Military and political objectives should be achieved without use of nuclear weapons, if at all possible.” The Russian early-warning system has deteriorated since the breakup of the Soviet Union (hence recent U.S. overtures to share data). Any national missile defense system must be tested extensively against a host of decoys before the United States can certify its technical effectiveness. As a result of conventional weaknesses, Russia has placed great reliance on nuclear weapons in its military strategy. The Russian government has been unable to negotiate effectively on the issue during the past few years; significant problems remain in the transparency of weapons systems between Russia and the United States, and fissile material stockpiles are hard to verify.

However, if you are looking for a balanced blueprint for the sizing, alert status, and verification of nuclear forces during the next two decades, you will not find it here. There are several bothersome aspects. The authors cite Article VI of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and chide the nuclear powers for failure to pursue more rapid reductions despite enormous changes in the 1990s. Except for one footnote on page 34, the authors fail to address the full provisions of Article VI, which calls for not only “cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and . . . nuclear disarmament” but also “a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” With international initiatives not in fact leading to “general and complete disarmament,” and with potential aggressors armed as they are today, the nuclear nations have no incentive to seek the reductions envisioned.

The authors place great stress on the premise that Russian command and control has dangerously deteriorated. In fact, the system seems to have functioned the way it was designed in the incident of the 1995 rocket launch from northern Norway. Assertions by the Russian defense minister indicate this fear is groundless. A “no first use” declaration concerning nuclear weapons by the United States is not in its national interest. The United States reacts to specific circumstances. It need not specify how it would respond to aggression, particularly involving weapons of mass destruction. Aggressors should realize that the United States considers nuclear weapons an absolute last resort, but aggressors should not be certain how the nation will respond, or be offered a
protective declaratory policy. Current U.S. security assurances, including the “no first use” negative-security assurance of 1978 concerning the Non-Proliferation Treaty, serve its interests well.

Low numbers of nuclear weapons would affect the international security environment and American presidential policies. First, a limit of two hundred nuclear weapons almost certainly would necessitate targeting population centers rather than military facilities. Such a strategy violates international law. Second, the United States must understand the impact such a reduction would have on allies to whom it extends nuclear protection. These countries can and likely would develop nuclear weapons on their own; proliferation as a result of destroyed confidence in American nuclear deterrence is not in the nation’s best interest. Third, other powers may conclude that they can and should make the investment in nuclear weapons to match the United States. Today, they have little chance of succeeding.

The authors harp on the “hair trigger” readiness (alert) status of U.S. nuclear weapons without explanation that launch on warning is only one presidential option. The United States has already removed strategic bombers and dual-capable aircraft from alert, detargeted ballistic missiles, removed nuclear capability from carriers and surface ships, and improved technical means to ensure against unauthorized firing or use of nuclear weapons. Russia has taken similar measures to dealert selected forces. However, none of these measures are unequivocally verifiable. There are no magic wands for foolproof verification. Moreover, in a dealerted world, a crisis could trigger the most precipitous, dangerous arms race to realert that the world has ever seen—highly destabilizing and potentially disastrous.

Finally, the real issue is not just numbers of nuclear weapons, “no first use,” alert status, or verification but the preservation of the peace between international entities that might resort to warfare if the calculus did not involve nuclear weapons. From 1600 to 1945, wartime casualties of civilian and military personnel generally varied between 1 to 2 percent of the world’s population (2.6 percent in World War II). After 1945 the casualty percentage dropped significantly, and since about 1953 has consistently remained near 0.1 percent. Nuclear weapons have been a key aspect of the preservation of peace between superpowers for the last five decades. The United States must fully understand the impact on American leadership of any new arrangement before it trashes what has proven to benefit world democracy and freedom.

HANK CHILES
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
U.S. Naval Academy


Readers of Colin Gray’s earlier works will not be disappointed by this new book, nor will his critics be surprised by his conclusions.

Gray argues that the end of the Cold War does not mean that nuclear weapons can be eliminated or forgotten. This book is indeed valuable for noting, and taking to task, the wide variety of academic trends and fashions that have drawn such optimistic conclusions since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Gray ably points to the many ways in