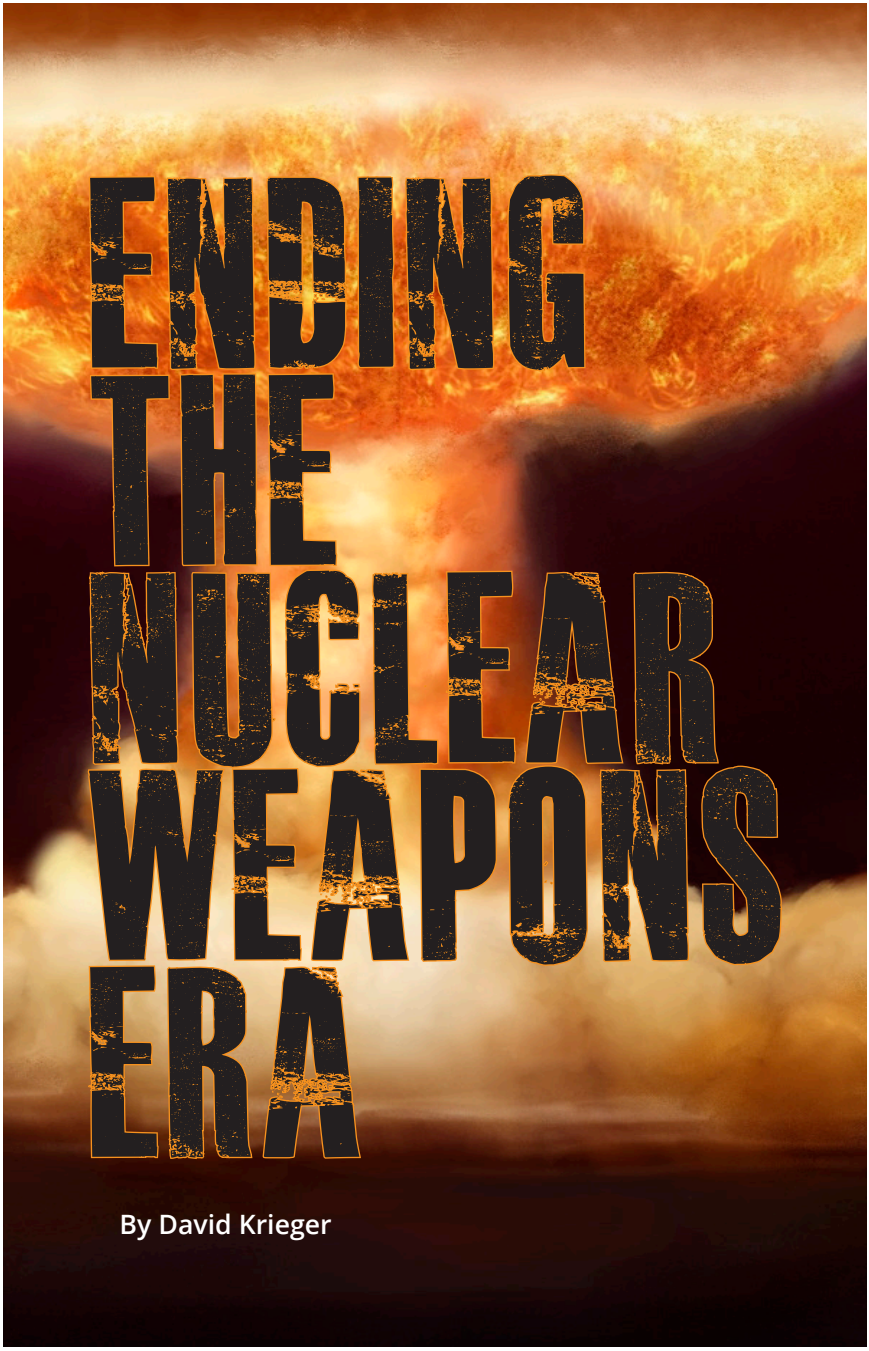

ENDING
THE
NUCLEAR
WEAPONS
ERA
By David Krieger

ENDING THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS ERA

A world free of nuclear weapons is not only desirable, it is essential. Nuclear weapons are the most deadly of all mass killing devices. They put at risk civilization, the human future and the future of life on Earth. As weapons that kill indiscriminately and cause unnecessary suffering, their threat or use is illegal under international law and also immoral. They waste resources that could be used to meet human needs. If we value civilization and life itself, we must find a path to abolishing nuclear weapons before they abolish us.

And yet, despite the overarching threat posed by nuclear weapons, they are generally viewed with complacency by the world's people. These weapons, in the arsenals of nine countries, are largely kept out of sight and out of mind. To the extent that possessing and threatening to use these weapons makes it into public consciousness and discourse, they are justified on the grounds of nuclear deterrence; that is, the threat of nuclear retaliation. Nuclear deterrence, however, is an unproven hypothesis about human behavior and a destabilizing one at that. How can a nuclear-armed country know that its nuclear deterrent force, no matter how powerful, is sufficient to prevent a nuclear attack?

A MAGINOT LINE IN THE MIND

Nuclear deterrence may be thought of as a Maginot Line in the Mind – a mental fortress to ensure against a nuclear attack. But the original Maginot Line built by France did not succeed at keeping the Germans from invading France in World War II. The Germans simply went around the heavily fortified Maginot Line and quickly defeated and occupied France. It was only in retrospect that the weakness of the Maginot Line became apparent. It may be the same with nuclear deterrence; only in retrospect will its weaknesses become apparent to the politicians, profiteers and military leaders who comprise an informal nuclear priesthood. If this is the case, it will be too late to save humanity and other forms of life from the ravages of nuclear war. It would reflect an enormous failure of imagination not to have foreseen such devastation and taken appropriate steps to prevent it.

At the height of the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and Soviet Union in the mid-1980s, there were some 70,000 nuclear weapons in the world. Since then, the number of nuclear weapons has fallen to under 15,000, still with some 93 percent in the arsenals of the U.S. and Russia. As demonstrated by the U.S. in 1945, just one of these weapons is capable of destroying a city. Today's nuclear weapons are many times more powerful than those used to destroy the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II.

Atmospheric scientists, in simulated studies, have found that the use of 50 Hiroshima-size nuclear weapons each by India and Pakistan on the other side's cities would result in soot rising into the upper stratosphere, blocking warming sunlight, shortening growing seasons, leading to crop failures and causing a Nuclear Famine that could take some two billion lives globally. An all-out nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia could lead to a Nuclear Winter, sending temperatures to their lowest levels in 18,000 years, triggering an Ice Age, and destroying most life on Earth. The stakes are clearly very high and demand more of us than the widespread complacency surrounding nuclear dangers.

A FLAWED TREATY

The most dominant nuclear powers – the U.S., UK and USSR – pressed in the 1960s for a treaty that would prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other countries. To achieve this treaty – the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – these nuclear powers needed to make two concessions: first, a commitment to negotiate in good faith for an end to the nuclear arms race and for nuclear disarmament; and second, to share the technology for the so-called "peaceful" uses of nuclear power with non-nuclear weapon states that are parties to the treaty. The treaty was opened for signatures in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. It divided the world into nuclear "haves" and "have-nots."

As defined by the NPT, the nuclear "haves" were those countries that had manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon prior to January 1, 1967. This added France and China to the treaty-sanctioned nuclear "haves," when they later joined the treaty.

Most non-nuclear weapon countries have joined the NPT and abided by its provisions, but the treaty has turned out to be a flawed instrument. Three countries never joined the treaty – Israel, India and Pakistan – and went on to develop nuclear arsenals; and one country, North Korea, withdrew from the treaty in 2003 and has developed a small nuclear arsenal. The treaty has not prevented five countries in Europe (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey) from hosting U.S. nuclear weapons, which in a time of war could be transferred to the host country's control. In addition, the U.S. has provided a "nuclear umbrella" to NATO countries, as well as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia.

The greatest flaw in the NPT, however, has to do with the failure of the parties to the treaty, particularly the nuclear weapon states, to negotiate in good faith for total nuclear disarmament. This has not happened, and thus the playing field between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots" has never been leveled. Further, the spread of nuclear reactors for research and energy purposes has made the bomb-grade nuclear materials needed to make nuclear weapons far more readily available.

Public complacency regarding nuclear weapons increased significantly when the Cold War ended in the early 1990s. The future seemed bright with the end of the U.S.-Soviet (to be replaced by Russia) confrontation, but the opportunity that presented itself to create a peaceful partnership was short-lived. The West never completely embraced Russia, and continued to expand NATO to the East despite promises George H.W. Bush made not to do so. A strong blow to good relations between Russia and the West was struck when George W. Bush unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, just 30 years after the treaty had entered into force under President Richard Nixon. This opened the door to further U.S. deployment of missile defenses near the Russian border, an extremely destabilizing factor that Russia argues has undermined their deterrent force in the long-standing Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) standoff between Russia and the West.

Any two countries that have offensive nuclear forces are capable of threatening the security of the other and, with good fortune and no accidents, preventing the other side from attacking, by means of nuclear deterrence. But if you add to this equation a missile defense force capable of destroying some or all of the other side's offensive forces, that dramatically changes the equation. Recent U.S. deployment of a missile defense installation in Romania near the Russian border, and plans to deploy another missile defense installation in Poland by 2018, have the Russians worried about their nuclear deterrent capability. The Russians have made this clear to the U.S. and NATO, but to no avail. As a result, the Russians are strengthening their offensive missile forces and are likely to have more nervous fingers on their nuclear launch buttons. This has led former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry to comment that the danger of a nuclear catastrophe is greater now than during the Cold War standoff. He also stated that, despite this, "our public is blissfully unaware of the new nuclear dangers they face." The same is true of the global population. With regard to nuclear dangers, most go about their lives "blissfully unaware."

All nine nuclear-armed countries are now engaged in modernizing their nuclear arsenals. The U.S. plans to spend $1 trillion doing so over the next three decades. Other nuclear-armed states have similarly ambitious plans. The waste of resources and lost-opportunity costs are staggering. Beyond this, however, modernization of nuclear arsenals is making the weapons smaller, more accurate and more efficient. All this sums to making the weapons more usable by military commanders and thus more likely to be used. Any steps by any nation that move the world closer to crossing the existing barriers to nuclear weapon use make the world far more dangerous. General James E. Cartwright, former

vice chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and former commander-in-chief of the U.S. Strategic Command, stated, "What going smaller does is to make the weapon more thinkable."

Modernizing nuclear arsenals is a violation of the NPT. It is the opposite of negotiating in good faith for an end to the nuclear arms race. In fact, it is stimulating new nuclear arms races. In addition, the nuclear-armed states that are parties to the NPT are purposefully avoiding engaging other countries in good faith negotiations for nuclear disarmament. While many nations were engaged in discussions in 2016 on closing the legal gap with regard to nuclear weapons through a United Nations Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) on nuclear disarmament, the nuclear weapon states joined together in arrogantly boycotting these discussions. The OEWG concluded in 2016 by calling for the initiation of negotiations in 2017 on a treaty to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. Of the nine nuclear weapon states, only China, India and North Korea have shown some positive support of these negotiations.

A DANGEROUS HUBRIS

The hubris of the nuclear-armed countries is exceedingly dangerous. Not only is the breakdown of nuclear deterrence a possibility, but there are many other potential downsides to possessing and threatening to use nuclear weapons. These include nuclear proliferation, nuclear terrorism, nuclear accidents and nuclear insanity. The NPT sets forth a solution based on good faith negotiations to level the playing field with zero nuclear weapons, but such negotiations have yet to begin more than 47 years after the NPT entered into force.

Despite former President Obama's early enthusiasm for U.S. leadership toward creating a nuclear weapon-free world, which he expressed in a 2009 Prague speech at the beginning of his presidency, he accomplished very little in that regard. His pivot toward Asia, including transfer of greater U.S. military forces into the East Asian region, has caused China to enlarge and enhance its minimum deterrent force to ensure its deterrent capability. President Obama left office with very little progress toward a nuclear weapon-free world. It remains unclear what role President Trump will play with regard to nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons threaten humanity and all other forms of life each and every day. Civilization could be destroyed in a single afternoon of nuclear warfare. Even today, more than a quarter century after the end of the Cold War, some 1,800 nuclear weapons remain on high alert, ready to be fired within minutes of an order to do so. Once the threshold of nuclear use is crossed again, there is no predicting where it could lead. There is a long history of nuclear accidents and miscalculations that could have resulted in nuclear detonations or

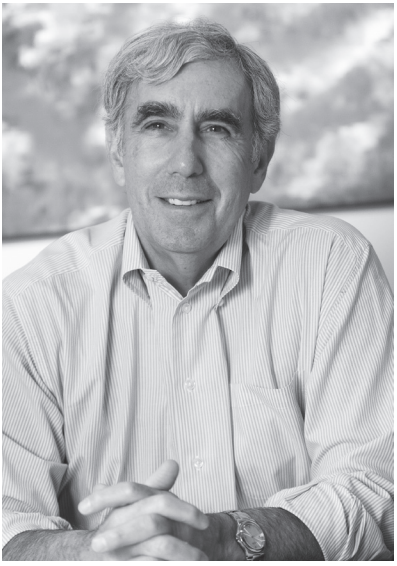
nuclear war. Should terrorists obtain nuclear weapons, nuclear deterrence will be completely undermined and will be ineffective against them. Nuclear deterrence cannot work against a terrorist group that has no territory on which to threaten retaliation; nor does it work against those who are suicidal.

The two-tiered structure of nuclear "haves" and "have-nots" will not hold. It cannot hold. We will either end the nuclear threat to humanity, or we will eventually suffer the consequences of not doing so. Complacency regarding nuclear weapons is akin to Nero fiddling while Rome burned. In this analogy, "We, the People" are Nero, and life on Earth is Rome burned in a fiery conflagration. It hasn't happened yet. There is still time to reverse our course. But first we must wake up to the dangers posed by nuclear arsenals. We must commit to ridding the world of nuclear weapons. This must be a full commitment, not a half-hearted one that is primarily aimed at disarming public concerns. The people must lead and they must impress upon their leaders that they expect them to manifest the political will to accomplish the goal of nuclear zero. In a world without nuclear weapons, nuclear war is not possible.

HUMANITY'S GREATEST CHALLENGE

Humanity's greatest challenge is to assure that our moral values prevail over our technological prowess. We must find a way to meet the threats posed by nuclear weapons with the strength of compassion and human decency. The threat is global and the solution must also be global. It will require negotiations with the aim of prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons. These will not be easy negotiations as there will be many interests at the bargaining table. It will require a new legal instrument for the phased, verifiable, irreversible and transparent elimination of nuclear weapons. It must be a treaty that accomplishes the elimination of nuclear weapons without leaving the world to be dominated by the powerful conventional forces of any state. In the end, it must be a treaty that changes the dynamics of the planet from the insanity of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) or Self Assured Destruction (SAD) to the needed new reality of Planetary Assured Security and Survival (PASS).

Nuclear modernization must end and the era of humanizing the planet must begin. There are great issues confronting humanity – hunger, disease, poverty, resource depletion, pollution, global warming and more. We must end the nuclear era with its multiple dangers to humanity and other forms of life, and move forward with the noble task of protecting and preserving the planet for future generations.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Krieger is a founder of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (www.wagingpeace.org) and has served as its president since 1982. He is a councilor on the World Future Council and a member of the Club of Rome. He is the author and editor of many books on abolishing nuclear weapons, including *Zero: The Case for Nuclear Weapons Abolition*. Follow him on twitter @DkriegerNAPF.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

It was 1982 when the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation opened its doors. For 35 years, we've been a strong and constant voice in the struggle to abolish nuclear weapons and to awaken the world to the challenges and dangers of the Nuclear Age. Our vision for a world at peace has never wavered. It never will.

Today, in what may be the most dangerous time in human history, we encourage you to learn more about the work of the Foundation. Follow us on facebook.com/wagingpeace, twitter.com/napf and instagram.com/napf4zero. Join us in working to abolish nuclear weapons. Our lives may well depend upon it.

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