

# Are Nuclear Weapons in a Multipolar World Order a Guarantee for Peace?

By [Federico Pieraccini](#)

Global Research, March 12, 2018

Theme: [Military and WMD](#)

In-depth Report: [Nuclear War](#)

*In the [previous article](#) I explained how the invention of the nuclear device altered the balance of power after WWII and during the cold war era. In this second article I intend to explain why nuclear-armed powers decrease the likelihood of a nuclear apocalypse, as counterintuitive as it seems.*

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the power that had hitherto counterbalanced the US ceased to exist. The world order changed again, this time becoming unipolar, bringing in its wake 30 years of death and destruction to practically every corner of the globe, particularly to the Middle East, Europe and Asia. With the end of a balance of power, the prospect of an American century ([PNAC](#)), so cherished by the neoconservatives and other fanatics of American exceptionalism, [became real](#) (see parts [2](#), [3](#) and [4](#) of an earlier series). For policymakers in Washington, the world was transformed into a battlefield, and the quest for global hegemony was the new (unrealistic) goal to be achieved.

What has happened over the last thirty years is still fresh in everybody's minds, with the United States ready to invade and bomb dozens of countries, in particular Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Serbia, Syria and Libya. Further chaos was wrought on the globe through the Arab Spring, armed coups and color revolutions. Every means was used to spread the influence of the United States across the globe, from the financial terrorism of bodies like Wall Street and the IMF, to the real terrorism of battalions of neo-Nazi extremists in Ukraine or fanatical Islamists in Syria and Libya. Washington's actions have placed continuous pressure on those it deems its mortal enemies, particularly over the last 10 years. Iran and North Korea have been living under this pressure for decades. China and Russia, thanks to economic growth and military power, have been able to put to a halt the attempts of American neoconservatives and liberal interventionists to alter the [balance](#) of power in the world. Until only recently, Washington did not even recognize any peer competitors. But we could suggest that since Crimea returned to being part of the Russian Federation in 2014, the America's unipolar moment has been [fading](#).

The focus of this analysis therefore concerns the current state of international relations that is passing into a new phase. Rather than focusing on the two Eurasian powers ([as has been done in the past](#)), attention is brought to the entirely new multipolar world order together with the need to take into account the existence of nuclear weapons. This is a new situation never seen before: multiple world powers contending with the famous doctrine of MAD. In fact, if we look at the world since the introduction of nuclear weapons, we recognize three distinct periods. The first one goes from 1945 to 1949; the second from 1949 to 1989; and the third from 1989 to 2014. Undoubtedly the greatest danger existed during the first phase, even if history has managed to hide it well. The US intended during that time to eliminate the USSR while it still enjoyed a monopoly on nuclear weapons. Fortunately, the

Soviet acquisition of its own nuclear weapons took this option away from the United States. It was only after the disappearance of the world's other balancing power that the remaining hegemonic power felt free to do as it wished, acting like a bull in a China shop and unleashing conflagrations around the globe.

The new era before us opens up many risks, with the rivalry between Russia and the United States escalating and with Beijing and Washington at loggerheads in Southeast Asia. But it could also be the beginning of an era of absolute strategic parity. The major point is that we have never seen a similar situation in history, where contending powers have the ability annihilate each other in the space of a few minutes, probably bringing humanity to extinction in the process. Such a destructive scenario is improbable precisely because of its destructiveness. If it is not to be outright excluded as a possibility, then it ought to be considered highly unlikely. The famous One Percent ruling over and controlling much of our lives would have a hard time thriving with five to six billion less human beings on the planet. The prospect of Armageddon cannot be contemplated by countries whose primary objective is survival. Trump, Putin and Xi Jinping must ensure the survival of their societies at any cost, and the use of nuclear weapons against other nuclear powers does not cohere with the natural instinct for survival.

In recent years, the impetus for a multipolar order must be attributed to Washington's [continuous quest for global hegemony](#), spreading wars and terror across the globe in the process. Given that national survival is the priority of states, it is easy to see why counterweights to American domination have arisen in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Small countries have seen the need to rely on more powerful countries like Russia and China to help protect them from the playground bully. Recent developments in the Middle East, Europe and Asia have had something to do with the confrontation between Washington and Beijing or Moscow and its regional allies. In the Middle East, Iran is targeted as well as other countries within Tehran's orbit. In Europe, countries that are politically close to Moscow are frowned upon. And in Asia, Washington's priority seems to be to undo any alliances Beijing has managed to create with its neighbours. The delusive quest for global hegemony, combined with continuous US military failures, has led to the [emergence of a multipolar reality](#), with two new poles now opposing Washington. Twenty years after the end of the bipolar era, [the unipolar era has also come to an end](#).

The tension has continued to build up in recent years, with Moscow and Beijing responding with various countermeasures, especially in the field of delivery vehicles for nuclear weapons and anti-ballistic missile systems. The efforts of Beijing and Moscow have been notable in the creation of nuclear systems able to overcome any recent missile-defence systems. Likewise, US nuclear deterrence is being questioned in the recently released US nuclear doctrine. Trump wants to spend nearly \$1 trillion over 10 years to upgrade and replace many of the essential elements of the US nuclear package, ranging from ICBMs and strategic bombers through to nuclear submarines. Even Beijing plans to create stealth bombers that can deflower America's virgin skies and devastate the country. In the experimental field are included such things as the Russian nuclear-powered underwater drone, as well as other systems as yet unknown to the public. Another important note is to assess a country's [defence capabilities against a nuclear attack](#). This is a military program that Russia, the United States and China have worked hard on, given the importance of advancing technologically with anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems. The primary objective of governments is the defence of their country. In a context where other nations are armed with nuclear devices, ABM systems become a priority to impede foreign aggressions with

nuclear weapons. Fortunately for the human race, the ability to stop a nuclear attack is not the sole reserve of any one nation, and it will be difficult to change certain balances of power in the short term. Acquiring a fully functional missile shield as the ABM intend to be is understandably on the bucket lists of Moscow, Beijing and Washington. Contrary to what one would think, it is precisely because ABM systems are unable to stop nuclear strikes that a nuclear war is highly improbable.

The multipolar world order exists in an environment that contains nuclear weapons, representing an unprecedented situation for humanity, one that could entail a new balance between powers. The same reason that led NATO not to participate directly in the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 also led Washington to be reluctant to arm its Islamist proxies on the ground in Syria with particularly effective weapons like surface-to-air missiles. The reason was to avoid entering into a direct conflict with Moscow in both Ukraine and Syria. The prospect of such a clash raises fears of an escalation that could easily get out of hand and become nuclear.

Such a prospect of a clash between powers that could lead to an escalation that is unacceptable highlights what has been discussed thus far. In a multipolar world order, instability is a constant factor, the actions of one's opponents being unpredictable. But when nuclear weapons are a factor, uncertainty is replaced with certainty, such that a decapitating strike by Washington on Moscow or Beijing would certainly entail a nuclear response by the latter. With such certainties, the likelihood of direct or indirect contact between peer competitors becomes highly unlikely. Even when involving smaller countries, confrontation can advance only to a certain level, becoming untenable once it threatens the involvement of bigger, nuclear-armed powers. The recent shooting down of an Israeli aircraft, and the exchange of missiles between Israel and Syria, shows how a regional clash, even if limited, is ruled out by the danger of Russia and America becoming involved. The same situation obtains in Asia, with tensions being present between Pakistan and India, India and China, and the DPRK and the United States. Mutually assured destruction is certainly an effective means of keeping a lid on things and maintaining regional balances.

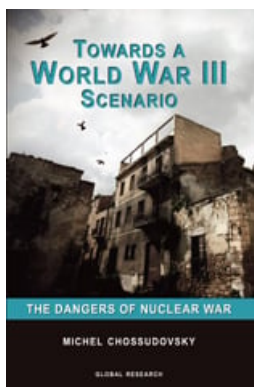
The next fifty years are likely to continue under a multipolar world order, with the four possible poles of Beijing, Moscow, New Delhi and Washington. These four great powers, with strong nationalistic sentiments, reminds one of the situation in the early twentieth century. Normally we would be in a World War I scenario, with powers struggling with each other for dominance. But because of the likely escalation of confrontation between powers into nuclear warfare and Armageddon, the contemporary world order seems to promise a return to political realism and the balance between powers.

We are facing an unprecedented situation for humanity, one where a stability lasting several decades may be achievable. The greatest danger comes from placing too much stock in [ABM](#) systems, which beguiles the foolhardy with the delusion that a decapitating strike may be possible thanks to a magic shield that protects the aggressor from any nuclear retaliation. As long as the principle of MAD remains intact, we will avoid a global catastrophe. Which is fortunate for humanity.

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*This article was originally published on [Strategic Culture Foundation](#).*

*Federico Pieraccini is an independent freelance writer specialized in international affairs,*



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ISBN Number: 978-0-9737147-5-3

Year: 2012

Pages: 102

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[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca). He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

The original source of this article is Global Research

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