

Scary 'R' Us: The Exaggerated Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Part 7 of 'Elephants in the room' series

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Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary." (H. L. Mencken 1880-1956)

The mainstream media repeatedly feeds us government propaganda about other countries and their supposed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 we were told that Iraq had chemical weapons that could be used to attack us in 45 minutes. Then we were told scare stories about Iran and North Korea posing a threat because they were developing nuclear weapons. Then we were told that the Syrian government was using chemical weapons, and this was a 'red line' being crossed, so the US had to attack Syria. Much of this was untrue or distorted. This post looks at how these weapons are really another exaggerated threat used to justify US and British war crimes.

Nuclear Weapons and Double Standards

"I would characterize current US nuclear weapons policy as immoral, illegal, militarily unnecessary, and dreadfully dangerous" –(Robert McNamara, former US Secretary of Defence)

"Nuclear War has no politically, militarily or morally acceptable justification" – (General Lee Butler, former commander-in-chief, US Strategic Air Command)(1)

The only country ever to have used nuclear weapons is the US. At the end of World War 2, in 1945, US bombers dropped two bombs on Japanese cities; one on Hiroshima, the other on Nagasaki. Each city was completely destroyed. Russia developed its own nuclear weapons shortly afterwards. For the next few decades, both countries developed huge arsenals of nuclear weapons, both sides claiming that they needed them to deter the other from invading. Britain, France and China created their own nuclear arsenals, and Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea have all developed them more recently. Politicians in countries that possess them claim they are for 'security', but the whole process increases the chances that nuclear weapons will be used again. Modern versions are much more powerful than the early ones. A single missile can now carry many warheads and is capable of killing millions of people in a large city. There are currently 13,000 warheads in the world's nuclear arsenals. The vast majority in the US and Russia.(2) This is enough to destroy the world many times over.

The situation with nuclear weapons today is one of the most obvious examples of double standards. Countries that already have them want to keep them, but they tell everyone else

not to develop their own. A large number of countries signed an agreement called the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which came into force in 1970. The whole point of the treaty was to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons. This treaty had two key parts. The first was that all countries that already had nuclear weapons would work towards complete disarmament.(3) The second was that other countries would not develop their own nuclear weapons. Western politicians and their media focus on the second part of the treaty, frequently discussing countries that might develop them, such as Iran, whilst rarely discussing their failure to eliminate their own nuclear weapons. Although the total number of warheads is less than it was, the existing nuclear weapons states have made no genuine effort to eliminate their weapons and clearly no longer intend to. We are now firmly headed in the wrong direction. The US has been developing smaller nuclear weapons called bunker-busters. These are intended to destroy bunkers that are deep underground, but the effects of these bombs would be similar to the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Large numbers of innocent people would die if they were ever used. Britain also intends to update its nuclear missiles.

Nuclear Deterrence – To Stop the US and Britain from Attacking Others

If powerful countries like the US and Britain persist with invading other countries to control their resources, there is little that a small, non-nuclear country can do to stop them. However, a single nuclear weapon is sufficient to deter the US from invading.(4) This is known as a nuclear deterrent. If you were running a country and a US President listed you in an ‘Axis of Evil’ and then invaded one of the other ‘evil’ countries, you would feel threatened. The US has effectively said “we can attack anyone we choose provided they are defenceless.” It has been pointed out that whilst America continues to invade countries that do not have nuclear weapons, Iranian and North Korean leaders would be mad not to develop them.(5)

A small country is not likely to fire nuclear missiles at anyone, as that country would immediately be destroyed by large numbers of nuclear missiles from other countries. As one commentator pointed out, “What possible reason would Iran have for attacking the US or Israel other than an irresistible desire for mass national suicide?”.(6) North Korea now has nuclear weapons and shows no signs of using them to attack anyone. Mainstream media discussions about Iran or North Korea’s potential nuclear capabilities are propaganda to scare us into supporting war or sanctions against countries whose leaders refuse to be manipulated by the US.

Many independent experts (that is, those who do not profit from nuclear weapons) have recognised that nuclear weapons are far too dangerous to have on a planet that still thinks in terms of war and exploitation, and are now in favour of the total elimination of nuclear weapons.(7)

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Nuclear weapons are a recent invention, but chemical and biological warfare has been used for thousands of years. The Spartans used arsenic smoke (chemical warfare) in approximately 400bc. Poisoning the water of your enemy with dead animals is a simple form of biological warfare and was used as far back as 590bc. Poisoning wells is still used in some conflicts. The modern version of this type of warfare is when the US destroys the sanitation system or the water supply of a country that it is invading. This causes large numbers of people (mostly innocent civilians) to become ill. The most vulnerable people (children, the

elderly, and people without a good diet) will die due to the spread of disease.(9) The governments of advanced nations have been responsible for the development of both biological and chemical weapons, many of which have been supplied to other countries. The US and Britain continue to research both biological and chemical weapons. The British research facility is at Porton Down. Both governments claim that they only want to understand them better, in case someone else uses them, but they will not allow independent inspectors to check their research facilities.(10)

The US uses more chemical weapons than any other country

There is much talk by politicians about the illegality of these weapons but this is just a smokescreen. Their lack of genuine concern can be seen in the historical record. Between the two world wars, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported the use of poison gas for killing enemies. The US used chemical weapons extensively throughout the Vietnam war (and there is even some evidence of their use of biological weapons.(11)) The most famous of these is napalm, a gel that sticks to the skin whilst burning for a long time at extremely high temperatures. The US also used millions of gallons of defoliants, such as agent orange, to kill the leaves on trees so that it would be easier for the US military to find their targets. They used poison gas that killed livestock and people,(12) and they used rice-killing herbicides to starve the population. Some of these herbicides contain dioxin, which has been described as the most poisonous molecule known to science. This poison caused large numbers of health problems, together with birth defects in the children of exposed victims. In a lawsuit in 1984 US soldiers were awarded compensation for exposure to some of these chemicals, but no compensation has ever been paid to the Vietnamese victims, many of whom are still suffering fifty years later.(13) More recently, the US has used white phosphorous – a chemical that burns intensely when water is thrown on it. Both the US and Britain have used depleted uranium, which is believed to have contributed to a rise in birth defects following the wars in Iraq.(14)

Bullets and Bombs are the real weapons of mass destruction

There is some inconsistency in moral arguments about chemical and biological weapons. In discussing the possible use of cyanide artillery, one observer noted that this would actually kill people with much less suffering than other weapons.(15) They are no worse than bullets, bombs and other weapons that hack off limbs, or leave people paralysed, brain-damaged or mutilated in many other ways. Ordinary bombs and missiles are capable of destroying whole cities. The weapons that cause the greatest suffering worldwide every year are small arms.

As we saw in earlier blogs, the US and Britain justified their attacks on Iraq and Syria by saying that those countries either possessed (Iraq) or were using (Syria) chemical weapons. We also discovered that both claims were lies. But we need to question these claims in another respect. The possession or use of chemical weapons by another country does not give the US or Britain the right to wage war against that country. It makes no sense to accept militaries using unlimited bombs and bullets to create carnage, but to object to chemical weapons on humanitarian grounds. This is just propaganda.

Terrorism?

Biological weapons have never been successfully used for large-scale terrorism, although five people were killed in the US by anthrax in 2001.(16) The reason these attacks are rare

is that it is very difficult for anyone other than governments to create effective biological weapons without advanced research labs, because they are so dangerous to work with. Chemical weapons have been used for terrorism, although the scale of the injuries has so far been no worse than an ordinary bomb. Sarin gas was released on the Tokyo underground in 1995, injuring many people but only killing twelve.(17) As with nuclear weapons, western governments use our fear of chemical and biological weapons to manipulate us.(18)

The term WMD is propaganda to exaggerate a threat

Older readers might recall that before 2003 the terms 'weapons of mass destruction' and 'WMD' were rarely used. Since President Bush decided to invade Iraq, the terms have been used repeatedly. If a politician says someone else has WMD, most people imagine a mushroom cloud over a city destroyed by a nuclear bomb. However, the phrase is often used to refer to chemical weapons. WMD is a clever propaganda phrase to mix-up these different weapons. The Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, possessed chemical battlefield shells that were old and degraded.(19) Even in their original, working condition they are ineffective for large scale killing unless fired in their thousands, as might happen on a battlefield. By calling them WMD, members of the public, politicians and journalists were duped into believing that he had been a much greater threat than was really the case, in order to scare people into accepting a criminal invasion of Iraq. The term WMD is deliberately used to exaggerate a threat.

Key Points

Nuclear weapons deter the US and Britain from invading other countries.

Leaders from nuclear powers are the biggest obstacle to eliminating nuclear weapons.

The threat posed by biological and chemical weapons is small.

The term WMD is propaganda to confuse chemical weapons with nuclear weapons, in order to exaggerate a threat.

Bullets and bombs are the real weapons of mass destruction

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This article was first posted at medium.com/elephantsintheroom.

Rod Driver is an academic who is particularly interested in de-bunking modern-day US and British propaganda. This is the seventh in a series entitled Elephants In The Room, which attempts to provide a beginners guide to understanding what's really going on in relation to war, terrorism, economics and poverty, without the nonsense in the mainstream media.

Notes

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Featured image: U.S. Army survey team member Staff Sgt. Nicky Lam, 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, New Jersey National Guard, inspects vials at a simulated crime scene during a training exercise at Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark, Sandy Hook, N.J., Sept. 25, 2018. The 21st WMD-CST support civil authorities at man-made or natural disasters by identifying chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear substances, as well as assess the consequences, advise on response measures, and assist in requesting follow-on forces. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

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