

Nuclear Madness

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A recent statement by Linton Brooks, who speaks for the National Nuclear Security Administration on nuclear weapons issues, should worry those who are concerned about the possibilities of a nuclear war. On March 4, Brooks told the East Tennessee Economic Council in the city of Oak Ridge (home to a major nuclear weapons complex), "The United States will, for the foreseeable future, need to retain both nuclear forces and the capabilities to sustain and modernize those forces,,, The end of the Cold War did not end the importance of nuclear weapons...I do not see any chance of the political conditions for abolition arising in my lifetime, nor do I think abolition could be verified if it were negotiated." These remarks were the first by a top government official publicly acknowledging US abandonment of a goal that could make the difference in whether life on this troubled planet will continue. The remarks revealed a serious departure from commitments by previous US administrations to their negotiating partners and the international community at large.

In September 1998, then-presidents Bill Clinton of the US and Boris Yeltsin of Russia signed a joint statement reaffirming the two countries' commitment to "the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament". They reiterated the promise of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty signed in 1968 by all leading nuclear powers of that era, including the United States, a treaty now used to restrain the nuclear ambitions of countries like Iran and North Korea. In the preamble to the accord, the signatories agreed "to facilitate the cessation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, the liquidation of all their existing stockpiles, and the elimination from national arsenals of nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery."The signatories reaffirmed their commitment to nuclear disarmament in more binding and unambiguous language in the treaty's Article VI. It states that "each of the Parties to the treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament."

If this were solely a matter of living up to one's word the matter would be serious enough. But the issue strikes fear into our hearts that these men are engaging in a dangerous game with little understanding of the consequences. These weapons are capable of what George Kennan has called "levels of such grotesque dimensions as to defy rational understanding." The US activities of updating nuclear weapons, threatening their use, and spreading nuclear technologies greatly increase the likelihood that such weapons will be used.

This militant posture is part of the administration's response to the tragedy of 9/11. Had that been an attack with one 20 megaton bomb exploding on the surface of Columbus Circle in New York, it would have produced a hole where twenty city blocks had been, a hole deep enough to hide a 20 story building. All brick and wood frame houses within 7.7 miles would be completely destroyed. The blast waves would carry through the entire underground subway system. Up to fifteen miles from ground zero flying debris, propelled by

displacement effects would cause more casualties. 200,000 separate fires would be ignited producing a firestorm with temperatures up to 1,500 degrees F. and wind velocities to 150 MPH. The fabric of water supplies, food and fuel for transportation, medical services, and electric power would be destroyed. And radiation damages that destroy and deform living things would continue for 240,000 years. Such bombs, and others still larger and more destructive, are contained in the warheads of missiles, many of them capable of delivering multiple warheads from a single launch.

In 1961, President Kennedy observed that, "...every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable. Every man, woman, and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or madness." Anyone who doubts that this current administration is capable of accident or miscalculation, must clearly not have been have not been paying attention. And to play these games unaware of the risks they are creating, can only be described as a form of madness.

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