

Why are promises of United States military superiority and increased military spending applauded by most of the populace, news media, and political leadership? Such promises deny reality: Military superiority is meaningless in the age of overkill.

A person or nation can be destroyed only once. No technological breakthrough can change that limit on military power. The 9,500 nuclear warheads in American strategic weapons alone can overkill Soviet cities more than 40 times; the Russians can destroy our cities about 40 times over.

Defense, as a shield, is nullified by the concentrated energy released by nuclear weapons. Hiroshima was destroyed by the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT. The Titan II whose fuel exploded recently in Arkansas carried a warhead containing 450 times the power of the Hiroshima explosive.

Still, these false assumptions remain widely accepted articles of faith:

*Preparing for nuclear war deters us from having one. Deterrence once meant reluctance to attack for fear of being unacceptably damaged. Assured "second-strike" capability — 200 protected nuclear weapons — was considered an adequate deterrent. But military tradition and nationalist competition require superiority and winning, not deterring. Thus, an unwinnable race was started for military advantage, ignoring overkill limits.*

Large wars, however regrettable, can be won. The blast, fire, and radiation damage from major nuclear attacks would immediately destroy more than half the United States and Soviet populations. Dr. Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, warns that in a major nuclear war, the earth's ozone layer would be damaged and that this "would persist for years, resulting in such intense ultra-violet irradiation of the earth's surface as to cause crop failure by direct damage to plants and by major alterations of climate, and to induce intense sunburn in a few minutes and markedly increase the incidence of skin cancer in those exposed." We must thus infer that even if either superpower could wipe out the opponent's nuclear forces by a flawless first strike, such success would alter the earth's envelope, making the planet equally unliveable for the population of the "successful" attacker as for the rest of the human race.

Limited nuclear wars (as envisioned in President Carter's Directive 59) can be planned and won. In a confrontation between nuclear-equipped armies, the side threatened with loss will bring up more-powerful conventional and nuclear weapons; then rapid nuclear escalation will occur with loss for all.

Additions to weapons and forces add to military power. Correction of all recently noted American military deficiencies offers no escape from the limits of military power. No improvements in number, size, accuracy, reliability or speed of weapons and forces can break through the overkill limit.

# Limits Of Military Power

By Seymour Melman



NEAR EASTERN

Military command and control can be reliable. Error and failure are unavoidable both in people and mechanisms, as repeated nuclear false alarms have illustrated. As powerful weapons are multiplied, no safeguards

can preclude catastrophic accidents.

What military operations can be performed without risking losing while winning? A superpower can overwhelm a small country (the United States, in the Dominican Republic, 1965; Soviet Union, in Czechoslovakia, 1968) — except where guerrilla forces resist (Vietnam, Afghanistan). Also, smaller countries can assault and exhaust each other if permitted by their weapons suppliers, the superpowers, as the Iraq-Iranian war illustrates.

Denial of military reality serves various interests. For Government managers, the armed forces and a military economy have been mainstays for empire-building at home and Pax Americana abroad; for corporate managers, a military economy assures risk-free profit. While the business press assails American managers for failing the nation by fostering industrial incompetence, appeals to nationalist nostalgia and primitive "we'll show 'em" militarism are welcome diversions. Many are receptive to hypernationalism because fundamentalist religiosity is often permeated with worship of the nation-state, a form of idolatry.

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However, there is, unattended by Establishment consensus, a military option for improving security: reversing the arms race by mutual agreement. In 1962, the superpowers separately detailed plans for agreed, inspected reversal of the arms race. The proposals were never negotiated. Our Government does not employ a single person with responsibility for thinking about reversing the arms race. The Establishment's refusal even to try for this alternative may go down as the crime of the century — if there is anyone around to know it.

The major candidates hardly differ in their militarism. Jimmy Carter cynically pursues military superiority and "limited" nuclear wars, and Ronald Reagan speaks for primitive nationalism and nostalgia for a replay of World War II. The headline anti-Communism strategists of both parties are ready to destroy the world "in order to save it."

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