Nuclear Weapons Are Useless  
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The prevailing wisdom has long held that it has been necessary to invest billions of dollars for nuclear weapons in order to deter other nations and stateless organizations from attacking us with weapons of mass destruction. Although the logic of this position has been convincingly challenged (see Green’s Security without nuclear deterrence, 2010), I add to this argument, that nuclear weapons are useless. In the abstract, nuclear deterrence seems plausible, but when we look at specific situations, we see that there is no scenario in which they can be used. Let us examine each of the three most likely scenarios: 1) an attack by a major power; 2) an attack by a minor power; and 3) an attack by a stateless group.

**An attack by a major power**  
A major power such as Russia, having about 5000 bombs, or China with less than 200 may have the capacity to deliver a large number of nuclear weapons to devastate the United States, but such an attack would accomplish nothing. According to Robock et all (2007), the climatic effects of the detonation of 2000 thermonuclear weapons, would produce a “ice-age conditions” lasting for at least ten years curtailing food supplies and the probable starvation of a billion people and according to Toon et al (2008), lead to the extinction of humans and other animals with adult body weights of more than 50 pounds. In addition to climatic changes there would be major radioactive fallout the effects of which scientists have been unable to establish.

As long as the leaders of these powers are rational the use of these weapons is unthinkable for reasons of self-survival. If, on the other hand, our leaders are not rational, the premise of deterrence is false and consequently so is the logic of nuclear deterrence. In either situation, nuclear weapons are useless.

Even a “regional” exchange of a 100 Hiroshima sized weapons, according to Starr (2008), “could produce as many fatalities as World War II and would significantly disrupt the global climate for at least a decade” and would lower average surface temperatures significantly shortening growing seasons and reducing average global precipitation.

**An attack by a minor nuclear power**  
A minor nuclear power would be only able to deliver two or three Hiroshima sized bombs with less than 1% of the current 100k ton thermonuclear bombs. Such an attack would cause serious damage and loss of life, but it would not be devastating. The question is how to respond to such an attack. Full scale nuclear response would cause the same climatic effects described above, and would incur a substantial loss of innocent civilian life, much more so than a response involving conventional weapons which would cause neither such a loss of civilian lives nor devastating climatic damage. Again, nuclear weapons are less useful. Furthermore, there are better nonmilitary, international ways of dealing with such rogue states, including quarantines and the world criminal court that would prevent future attacks and bring the perpetrators to justice.

**A nuclear attack by a stateless power**  
In the final scenario, a nuclear attack from an irrational group, a nuclear response it makes no sense to bomb a small group with a nuclear weapon, especially given that other mechanisms, cited above, would be more effective. Again nuclear weapons are useless.
Given that there is no scenario in which nuclear weapons can be used, it becomes clear that we would be more secure without them and we should unilaterally dismantle our 1000 weapons currently on hair-trigger alert. Such an act would prevent the possibility of an accident and there have been many near accidents. It would also reduce the possibility of nuclear material falling into the hands of irrational people who might be tempted to use them. This conclusion is consistent with the recommendation of the World Court of Justice who recommended that all nations with nuclear weapons begin to eliminate their holdings and is becoming more popular among the world’s political leaders who are beginning to recognize this argument.

References

Starr, Steven, 2008 Catastrophic Climatic Consequences of Nuclear Conflict INESAP Bulletin 28, April 2008