

# Review Essay

---

---

## Our Nuclear Future

George H. Quester

**Paul, T. V.** *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009.

**Quinlan, Michael.** *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons: Principles, Problems, Prospects*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

**Reed, Thomas C., and Danny B. Stillman.** *The Nuclear Express: A Political History of the Bomb and Its Proliferation*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Zenith Press, 2009.

**Rublee, Maria Rost.** *Nonproliferation Norms: Why States Choose Nuclear Restraint*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.

In combination, the first three books in this review essay provide a plausible overview of the future of nuclear weapons. They also provide a counterpoint for much of the current commentary regarding these weapons. We are beset with projections that nuclear weapons will rapidly spread to a plethora of nations (this pessimism is hardly new; one need only refer back to a 1958 National Planning Association publication titled *1970 without Arms Control*, which predicted more than 20 nuclear powers by 1970); predictions that such weapons will come into use for the first time since Nagasaki if proliferation is not halted and major nuclear disarmament does not occur; and declarations that now is the time to plan for total nuclear disarmament in a move toward “global zero.”

These three books each rebut a portion of those predictions. Michael Quinlan’s *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons* shows how such total nuclear disarmament can indeed be implemented, but also how difficult it will be to achieve, as long as serious political disputes remain among nations. Maria Rost Rublee’s *Non-Proliferation Norms* discusses why a great number of countries which could have produced nuclear weapons have instead chosen, for domestic or external reasons, not to do so. T. V. Paul’s *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* lays out the logic and his-

tory of how such weapons have enabled deterrence, even when they have been produced in large quantities.

Putting the lessons of these books together, we can sketch out a future, despite the optimism of the American and Russian governments and pronouncements by former policymakers such as Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, that the world will go at least another century with major nuclear arsenals persisting in the United States and Russia. Additional stockpiles will probably remain in France, Britain, China, and a few other nations. It is doubtful, however, that nuclear weapons will spread to many more states, and it is quite probable that mankind will never witness use of nuclear weapons.

Michael Quinlan's book offers an overview of the subject and excellent insight, given his long service as a senior nuclear policymaker in Great Britain. This book is all the more valuable since there has been so little serious discussion of nuclear policy at the highest levels, such as the American executive and legislative branches. US Air Force officers currently show less interest than in the past in serving in nuclear commands, as "nuclear-weapons policy" is regarded as an out-of-date subject. Such neglect provides a real risk that minor and major decisions related to nuclear policy and strategy will be affected by this lack of interest.

The inclination to think less about nuclear weapons and policy may be a good sign, reflecting the low probability that such weapons will again come into use. It also reflects generally lower levels of tension among the major powers since the end of the Cold War. But, even if this inattention is a result of positive factors, it can lead to less than professional handling of the weapons that remain, and a blurring of our memories regarding the roles that nuclear weapons have played.

Quinlan steers between what he labels the "righteous abolitionists," who project a total nuclear-free world without sufficiently assessing how one gets there, and the "dismissive realists" who regard such a world as simply out of the question. His assessment of the choices on disarmament and arms control, and on declaratory postures regarding nuclear-weapons use, reinforces many of the realists' arguments. Quinlan notes the risks that always persist as long as nuclear weapons exist, while at the same time rebuffing the pessimism that postulates such weapons are bound to be used. He reminds us of the deterrent impact nuclear weapons have had, at the very outset of the book suggesting that the dead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki may have prevented millions of casualties later. In his en-

dorsement for a continued pattern of non-use of nuclear weapons, he at the same time notes how the threat of such use reduced the likelihood of conventional war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The author also believes that these weapons reduced the likelihood of other weapons of mass destruction being used. Quinlan includes a valuable discussion of the evolution of British, Indian, and Pakistani nuclear-weapons policy and offers a resounding endorsement of continued efforts to prevent horizontal nuclear proliferation.

Maria Rublee's book is valuable as an antidote to a realist pessimism regarding whether nuclear proliferation can be contained. She offers a detailed and well-written account of the decisions in Japan, Egypt, Libya, Sweden, and Germany to forego nuclear weapons. Addressing the academic community, she applies a series of alternative political science theories to explain these cases, including a realist emphasis on power politics, compared with the theories of neoliberal institutionalism, and with a constructivist or ideational approach. Rublee favors the latter and argues that realists tend to underrate the role of norms and ideas. Her case may be the strongest for Sweden, which had a nuclear-weapons program and gave it up, less because of external pressure than because of domestic values. Such decisions may be a bit harder to square for Germany and Japan, where the world's memories of World War II have played a role.

T. V. Paul's book joins the same political science debate, focusing instead on the "tradition" of non-use of nuclear weapons, which sometimes is described by other analysts as a taboo or a norm. Paul presents a valuable survey of the history of why such weapons have not been used since Nagasaki, arguing that the constructivist political scientists may be exaggerating the role simply of ideas, with the practical considerations of national interest playing a major part in keeping these weapons from being used.

One could indeed find a logical parallel in terms of national interests between the continuing mutual-deterrence pattern of "no first use," in which one side's weapons are held in check as long as the other side does similarly, and a pattern of no first proliferation, where inherent capabilities to produce nuclear weapons are not employed, as long as the other side does not acquire such weapons. The relationship between Argentina and Brazil may illustrate this point most dramatically, and the pattern may also explain a good portion of the nuclear-weapons production options that have not been exercised.

Paul supports the view presented by Quinlan and Rublee that it remains important to strive to prevent further nuclear proliferation, and he shows how non-use has interacted with nonproliferation. The author presents an interesting analysis of conflicts where one side had nuclear weapons and the other did not, for example, in the Falklands War between Britain and Argentina. Political scientists may welcome the Rublee and Paul books as examples of how one can apply alternative theories to concrete policy issues, but someone else will find these books all the more valuable, just as Michael Quinlan's, for the meticulous and nuanced coverage of the nuclear issue, presented in clearly written forms.

The fourth book reviewed, *The Nuclear Express: A Political History of the Bomb and Its Proliferation*, by Thomas C. Reed and Danny B. Stillman, is a lively and interesting reinforcement of our understanding of the issues on nuclear weapons, with recommendations substantially matching those of the other authors. This book is much more pessimistic about the current state of affairs, however, and there may also be some real problems regarding the reliability of the anecdotes and factual history it presents. The book's style is hardly too academic in tone or too much inclined to political science, but is instead a bit too chatty and broad-brush, with a tremendous amount of offhand commentary that might mean many different things. Anyone studying the history of the emergence and spread of nuclear weapons should certainly examine this book, but the absence of footnotes for many of the startling revelations may give one pause.

Some of Reed and Stillman's assertions are what we have long suspected, for example, that the United States deliberately turned a blind eye toward Israeli nuclear-weapons programs in the Johnson Administration and other administrations. Also, that American assistance was given to the French program in the Nixon years, and that the Soviets for a time assisted the Chinese. The authors do provide details on these interactions that have not been published elsewhere.

Some other claims may be harder to verify, for example, that the United States would have been able to deliver one bomb a week against Japan following Nagasaki (the normal history has been that bombs would have been available at a much slower rate), or that Klaus Fuchs actively aided the Chinese nuclear-weapons program after returning to East Germany, or (a major assertion of the book) that Beijing has been an extremely active promoter of nuclear proliferation under Mao, Deng Xiaoping, and up to the present. The book's overall credibility is marred by state-

ments regarding what the rest of us indeed may already know, referring, for example, to Fudan University in Shanghai as an “enormous, fenced, and guarded complex” (all Chinese universities are gated communities, but Fudan has been nonetheless quite easy for any foreign visitor to walk into), and to Fudan’s Center for American Studies as being “part of the vast vacuum cleaner studying the West.” The center, funded in part by US government grants, has indeed been seen as an open and free-thinking junction-point for Sino-American exchanges on arms control and security.

The physical-science side of the book is well-informed, since the two authors have been important weapon designers at the Livermore and Los Alamos laboratories, but the political commentary is often too blunt to capture all the possibilities and subtleties. The anecdotal material and startling factual assertions make *The Nuclear Express* fun to read, and it serves as a valuable reminder that the continued spread of nuclear weapons is indeed a danger to us all, a theme shared in all four books. But whether the situation is quite so out of control, and whether China is such a major obstacle to efforts to halt proliferation, is more debatable.

**The Reviewer:** Dr. George H. Quester is a professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland. He is a graduate of Columbia College, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard, and has taught at Harvard, Cornell, UCLA, the National War College, and the US Naval Academy.

#### ***How to Submit a Change of Address***

When you have a change of address, please be sure to notify the *Parameters* office. Doing so will help ensure you continue to receive the journal and will reduce postal costs. Submit your change of address by any of these methods:

- **E-mail:** CARL\_Parameters@conus.army.mil.
- **Telephone:** 717-245-4943 or DSN 242-4943.
- **Fax:** 717-245-4233 or DSN 242-4233.
- **Mail:** US Army War College  
Attn: *Parameters*  
122 Forbes Avenue  
Carlisle, PA 17013-5238