



Anita Stegel

The Old Imagery Of War Is Outdated

By Lloyd S. Etheredge

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Government policies are often sophisticated expressions of fairly simple underlying images. In some cases, these images are useful guides; in others — national security is one — the images do not truly fit changing realities, and mislead us. Yesterday's realism is becoming tomorrow's dream world.

A common, intuitive way to think about nuclear deterrence is to imagine that we are *here*, the Russian threat is *out there*, and the problem is to deter the Soviet Union's power from being used to affect us. This structure of images gains plausibility because, of course, the Russians and their nuclear-delivery systems are geographi-

cally at a distance. With enough toughness and enough destructive potential aimed against them, it seems possible to keep them there. At least, we will have that 15-minute warning.

But the imagery is outdated, and technological changes make it possible for the nuclear threat to pass effortlessly through the strongest defenses.

Nuclear bombs can now be made portable, at least by several countries. They probably need to be slightly larger than a baseball but certainly they can fit in a suitcase or small trunk. The Russians already have the capability to place nuclear warheads throughout the United States quietly, as we have to situate them throughout the Soviet Union, as Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi will soon have to destroy all Israeli cities effortlessly and without warning, as the Israelis will have to destroy all of Libya's cities.

Most of the current ideas about early radar warnings, about adding long-range delivery vehicles (and feeling secure because some nuclear countries do not have them), satellite laser-gun technology, counterforce capabilities against an enemy's visible delivery systems, new penetration aids for new generations of more-expensive bombers, are quite pointless.

The truth is, the imagery of World War II artillery exchanges and frontal tank assaults is outdated. Demoraliza-

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tion and the end of the will to fight can be rapid when a nation discovers that the game is over in advance, that there is no defense, and that the Trojan grain shipments, diplomatic pouches, and Bolshevik trunks marked "tutus" reached the intended agents, for further dispersal, two years ago.

Our deterrence policies also are starting to lag behind changing reality because they are based on an image that, well, at least we know who the other side is, could see their weapons being launched, and thus deter them by ensuring retaliatory destruction against their people and territory.

But when no weapons need be launched? And foreign-policy demands arrive in the name of fictitious groups, and sample nuclear *in situ* detonations start? Would it be we, the Pakistanis, the Indians, the Chinese, or the Iranians who want the Russians out of Afghanistan? Would it be the Russians, the Libyans, the Chinese, the Brazilians, or the Indians who want the increase in United States food aid to third-world nations? In 10 years, as the technology proliferates, the lists will become much longer.

All of this sounds farfetched, a demonstration of how people can scare themselves with a creative imagination. Would a sensible country want to

open this Pandora's box? Maybe not. But if we are as hostile to the Russians as they keep saying we are, and vice-versa, we had both better watch out.

Col. Edward House, who was a senior political adviser to Woodrow Wilson, was once asked about his unflinching courtesy to other people, a trait his questioner found odd, given his position of power. The colonel explained that he had grown up in the Old West when most people you dealt with packed six-guns. Under those conditions, he thought, people learned fast that being arrogant was not very smart.

Conceptual restructuring is one of the hardest things for governments to learn. But the simple image of national security based on fear is being overtaken by technology.

If, instead of more bombs and rockets, the Reagan Administration can think of ways to use the extra \$181 billion it wants for defense to increase positive outcomes, for everyone, through trade and peaceful cooperation, it would be a sensible use of the lead time.

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