

# Learning to Love – and Use – the Bomb

**Exclusive:** The endless demonizing of Russian President Putin is the new fun game in Official Washington as neocons dream about “regime change” in Moscow and military contractors drool over huge profits from “modernizing” America’s nuclear arsenal, with few thoughts about the heightened risk of nuclear annihilation, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

At a time when America’s public sector is apparently too strapped financially even to provide safe drinking water for some of its residents, the Obama administration plans to commit the nation to spending at least \$1 trillion over the next three decades to improve our ability to fight a nuclear war. That’s right, an almost unthinkable war that would end up destroying much of the habitable portion of the globe.

That wasn’t the message President Obama conveyed in April, 2009 when he declared in Prague, “The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War. Generations lived with the knowledge that their world could be erased in a single flash of light. Just as we stood for freedom in the Twentieth Century, we must stand together for the right of people everywhere to live free from fear in the Twenty-first Century.

“And as . . . the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. So today, I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”

How times change. Today, warns former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry, “we are now on the verge of a new nuclear arms race” based on a return to Cold War thinking. “Moreover, I believe that the risk of a nuclear catastrophe today is greater than it was during the Cold War – and yet our public is blissfully unaware of the new nuclear dangers they face.”

Russia shares some of the blame, with its ostentatious talk of developing new weapons like a giant nuclear-tipped torpedo designed to “cause guaranteed devastating damage to the country’s territory by creating wide areas of radioactive contamination.”

But a far greater risk to global security is the Obama administration’s so-called nuclear “modernization” program, which the Pentagon is promoting at the same time U.S. policymakers are incessantly demonizing Russia as the chief

threat to the United States and its allies.

In theory, the administration aims merely to ensure that America's nuclear deterrent remains "robust", that is, credible enough to dissuade any other nuclear power from contemplating an attack on U.S. forces, or installations, or cities.

But U.S. nuclear forces are currently sized with only one potential enemy in mind: Russia. The United States has an estimated 1,900 nuclear weapons deployed, versus 1,780 for Russia. The next largest nuclear power is France, with just 290 deployed weapons. The total U.S. nuclear stockpile of 7,200 warheads is 28 times bigger than China's.

Apparently all that isn't enough to let top Pentagon officials sleep at night. President Obama's new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford, told the Senate Armed Services Committee last year that he believes Russia poses the greatest threat to U.S. national security, "an existential threat" no less. "If you look at their behavior, it's nothing short of alarming," he declared.

### **Curtis LeMay Redux**

Lest Russia launch an all-out attack, for reasons unknown, the Obama administration proposes building 12 new nuclear-armed submarines, 100 long-range strategic bombers armed with a new class of bombs, 400 silo-based ballistic missiles, and 1,000 nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. It's almost as if Air Force General Curtis LeMay were still running the show.

An authoritative study by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies estimates the full cost of this program over 30 years at more than \$1 trillion, with no allowance for cost overruns, delays, or clean-up and decommissioning costs.

But cost may be the least of the problems with Obama's agenda. One common if disguised element of these "modernization" programs is their ability to make nuclear "war-fighting" more, not less, conceivable by increasing the targeting flexibility of these weapons and, in some cases, reducing their yield so they resemble very large conventional weapons rather than the all-or-nothing nukes of old.

For example, as the *New York Times* reported, the recently tested B61 Model 12 nuclear bomb has steerable fins that permit pin-point accuracy and configurable yields to as little as two percent of the "Little Boy" bomb dropped on Hiroshima. General James E. Cartwright, retired vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former head of the United States Strategic Command, said

“what going smaller does is to make the weapon more thinkable.”

Similarly, the proposed new Long-Range Stand-Off weapon, a vastly upgraded nuclear cruise missile, “is designed for nuclear warfighting,” states Stephen Young, a senior analyst in the Global Security Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “Unfortunately, for that very reason, deploying this weapon will actually make the United States less secure.”

Moving to a nuclear war-fighting capability violates the official U.S. policy outlined in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, which called for steps to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attack, with the objective of making deterrence of nuclear attack on the United States or our allies and partners the sole purpose of US nuclear weapons.”

Once policymakers start seriously considering “limited war” scenarios in which nuclear weapons might come in handy, the risk of war shoots way up. At the same time, the acquisition of war-fighting capabilities will prompt the other side to follow suit.

### **Easing into Nuclear War**

As James Doyle, a former nonproliferation analyst at Los Alamos National Laboratory, put it, “Lowering the threshold of nuclear war poses the very real threat of rapid escalation in a conflict potentially resulting in the use of many, more destructive nuclear weapons.”

Russia certainly views the Obama administration’s current nuclear program as upsetting the stability of traditional deterrence. Following a recent test of the new B61-12 bomb, Russia’s deputy defense minister, Anatoly Antonov, denounced it as “irresponsible” and “openly provocative.”

Russia is also gravely concerned about another development that could, in theory, make the United States contemplate a “limited” nuclear war: the expansion of the U.S. ballistic missile defense network in Europe. President Vladimir Putin called that “an attempt to undermine the existing parity in strategic nuclear weapons and essentially to upset the whole system of global and regional stability.”

The biggest risk from all these developments isn’t a planned nuclear war, but an unplanned nuclear exchange triggered by a false alarm in an atmosphere of mutual paranoia. Both the United States and Russia have hundreds of nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert, ready to “launch on warning” lest they be destroyed in a sneak attack. Our survival thus far is thanks in part to luck; scholars have documented at least 20 accidents that might have started an accidental nuclear war in years past.

There's no guarantee that our luck will hold out, however. Thanks to growing fears of being wiped out without warning by stealthy U.S. weapons, "Russia has *shortened* the launch time from what it was during the Cold War," according to Bruce Blair, a nuclear security expert at Princeton. "Today, top military command posts in the Moscow area can bypass the entire human chain of command and directly fire by remote control rockets in silos and on trucks as far away as Siberia in only 20 seconds."

The priority of U.S. nuclear policy today should not be investing in staggeringly expensive new technology that makes us *less* secure by making nuclear war more thinkable and thus more unpredictable. It should be overwhelmingly focused on nuclear risk reduction: lowering the threats perceived by each nuclear power, eliminating launch-on-warning policies, and exploring other confidence-building measures. Our greatest security task is to modernize our thinking about nuclear weapons, not our nuclear weapons technology.

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## Panicked Over the Trump Phenomenon

America's conservative establishment is in panic mode as renegade billionaire Donald Trump continues to dominate the Republican presidential race and thumb his nose at the GOP donor class, which is alarmed that all its money might not dictate the outcome this time, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship write.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

David Brooks is a worried man. Like many establishment Republicans, the conservative columnist for *The New York Times* sees the barbarians pouring through the gates and fears for both his party and the republic. Hail, Trump! Hail, Cruz! It's enough to send a sober centrist dashing through the Forum in search of a cudgel.

There was Brooks on a recent edition of the *PBS NewsHour*, his angst spilling out across the airwaves like fog from a nightmare: "I wish we had gray men in suits," he told Judy Woodruff, conjuring in some nostalgia-minded the courtly

cabal of well-heeled businessmen who drafted war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower to run for president as a Republican.

“We don’t have that,” Brooks continued. “But the donor class could do something.”

Ah, yes. The donor class! Those deep pockets flung open even wider by the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision just six years ago, permitting the richest of the rich to pour even more of their fortunes into control of our electoral process. Brooks was saying openly what many of them are thinking privately: Only we can save the party from the megalomania of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz and protect our precious status quo.

How best to do this? Brooks suggested that panicked “state legislators who are Republicans, congressmen, senators, local committeemen” should join with the donors “so they don’t send the party into suicide.”

Makes sense, many of those very same folks already are deep in hock to the donors, their contributions often laundered via entities with high-falutin’ names ALEC, for one, the American Legislative Exchange Council that lends a helping corporate hand to legislators eager to write favorable laws, provide tax breaks, dismember public employee unions and privatize government services.

As Brooks’ vision of a coup unfolded, the donors and their allies would handpick their candidate, “winnowing the field.” He reiterated his *NewsHour* lamentations with a *New York Times* column headlined “Time for a Republican Conspiracy!”

So let’s get this straight: One of the most prominent of Republican elites in the country, who has even been touted as President Obama’s “favorite pundit” (we’re not making this up!), is calling on the donor class to rescue the party from the rabble. Game’s over, voters: The oligarchs will decide this election.

For that’s what they are: a small, unbelievably wealthy group of the powerful and privileged who already have a tighter grip on our nation, its government, politics and economy than the rapacious robber barons of our first Gilded Age. Brooks and like-minded elites believe they must be trusted to do the right thing. Let them be the Deciderers.

Count billionaire Charles Koch among them. He recently told Stephen Foley of the *Financial Times* that he was “disappointed” by the current crop of Republican presidential candidates and especially critical of Trump and Cruz. “It is hard for me to get a high level of enthusiasm,” he said, “because the things I’m passionate about and I think this country urgently needs aren’t being addressed.”

Koch said that he and his well-oiled machine had given each of the candidates a list of issues it wants addressed but “it doesn’t seem to faze them much. You’d think we could have more influence.” In other words, if you’re going to spend \$900 million on this election, as Koch and his cronies plan to do, shouldn’t you get what you paid for?

Yes, we know: money can’t always buy an election. If it could, Mitt Romney would just be finishing his first term as president. Or Jeb! Bush, whose super PAC runneth over with \$100 million in cash, would be leading the pack. So far he’s not even been able to get his silver foot on the first rung of the ladder.

But to the oligarchs, bankrolling an election campaign isn’t all that it’s about. They contribute now for the day when the electioneering is over and the governing resumes. That’s when their investment really begins to pay off.

In the words of the veteran Washington insider Jared Bernstein, senior fellow at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities and former chief economic advisor to Joe Biden, “There’s this notion that the wealthy use their money to buy politicians; more accurately, it’s that they can buy policy.”

Environmental policy, for example, when it comes to energy moguls like the Kochs. And tax policy. Especially tax policy.

Bernstein was quoted in one of the most important stories of 2015 an investigation by *The New York Times* into how tax policy gets written. Unfortunately, this complex but essential report appeared between Christmas and New Year’s and failed to get the attention it deserves. Here’s the heart of it:

“With inequality at its highest levels in nearly a century and public debate rising over whether the government should respond to it through higher taxes on the wealthy, the very richest Americans have financed a sophisticated and astonishingly effective apparatus for shielding their fortunes. Some call it the ‘income defense industry,’ consisting of a high-priced phalanx of lawyers, estate planners, lobbyists and anti-tax activists who exploit and defend a dizzying array of tax maneuvers, virtually none of them available to taxpayers of more modest means.

“Operating largely out of public view, in tax court, through arcane legislative provisions and in private negotiations with the Internal Revenue Service, the wealthy have used their influence to steadily whittle away at the government’s ability to tax them. The effect has been to create a kind of private tax system, catering to only several thousand Americans.”

That “private tax system” couldn’t have happened without compliant politicians elected to office by generous support from the donor class. As the right-wing

billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife put it: “Isn’t it grand how tax law gets written?”

Sam Pizzigati knows how it happens. He’s been watching the process for years from his perch as editor of the monthly newsletter *Too Much!* Reminding us in a recent report that “America’s 20 richest people, a group that could fit nicely in a Gulfstream luxury private jet, now own more wealth than the bottom half of the American population combined, a total of 152 million people,” Pizzigati concludes that one reason these and other of America’s rich have amassed such large fortunes is that “the federal tax rate on income in the top tax bracket has sunk sharply over recent decades.”

So here’s the real value of all that campaign cash and lobbying largesse: underwriting a willingness among legislators and government officials to bend the rules, slip in the necessary loopholes and look the other way when it comes time for the rich to hide their fortunes.

This is the status quo to which the donors cling so tightly and clutch their pearls at the prospect of losing. But now, with Trump seemingly ascendant, some of those who might have been relied on to support a donor revolt are betraying Brooks’s call for a coup, weakening in their resolve and beginning to think that maybe the short-fingered vulgarian isn’t such a bad idea. Despite his populist brayings, they hope, he might well be brought into their alliance.

Which brings to mind a line from the movie version of the musical *Cabaret*. In pre-Third Reich Germany, the decadent Baron Maximilian von Heune is talking with the British writer Brian Roberts, explaining why the elite have allowed this Hitler fellow to get a jackboot in the door.

“The Nazis are just a gang of stupid hooligans, but they do serve a purpose,” he says. “Let them get rid of the Communists. Later we’ll be able to control them.”

We all know how well that turned out.

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# Islamic State's Bloody Decline

Washington's pundit class has interpreted the Islamic State's recent turn toward international terrorism as proof of its growing strength, but it may actually represent the opposite, the group's recognition that its "caliphate" is under stress and shrinking, observes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Large-scale armed insurrection tends to move through identifiable phases that correspond roughly to what Mao Zedong described many years ago. In Mao's formulation, the first of three phases emphasizes organization, propaganda, and the establishment of cadres and a presence in the areas in which the revolutionary movement intends to operate.

The second phase is more violent and typically includes operations we would describe as terrorist attacks, as well as larger scale guerrilla warfare. The purposes of this phase include demonstrating the strength and vitality of the movement and eroding the will and resources of the adversary.

The third phase includes a transition to conventional military operations, on a big enough scale to sweep to a final victory. This sequence tracks the history of the Chinese Communist Party's road to power and, in modified form, the strategy and trajectory of some other movements such as the Viet Minh.

Such strategies do not always succeed. Groups such as Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka followed a similar course of using terrorist attacks and rural-based guerrilla operations as steps in growing strong enough to challenge for power. In their cases they followed that course successfully for a good while, and came to pose a very serious challenge to the established order in each of their countries before being finally beaten.

Failure of the strategy can involve, as long as the movement is alive, a walking back from a later phase of operations to what was supposed to be only an earlier one. Failure at conventional military operations and large-scale guerrilla warfare may mean resorting to small-scale terrorism. Sendero Luminoso still exists, and is on the U.S. official list of foreign terrorist organizations, even though the Peruvian military essentially defeated it about a decade ago.

Something similar occurred with the Algerian war for independence, even though the National Liberation Front (FLN) achieved its political objective of becoming the ruler of an independent Algeria. The FLN won politically when Charles de Gaulle bowed to the inevitable in satisfying Algerian nationalist aspirations,



but the French army had bested the FLN militarily.

By the time Algeria got its independence in 1962, the FLN's violent operations had been reduced to sporadic terrorism. Those operations were matched on the other side by terrorist operations of the Secret Army Organization, consisting of French settlers and renegade military officers who resisted giving up Algeria.

The radical Islamist group known as ISIS has exhibited some of the same sequencing as have other violent movements, although ISIS has tried to compress the schedule significantly, especially with its proclamation of a caliphate. (Mao didn't proclaim establishment of the People's Republic of China until October 1949, when his party had won the Chinese civil war and the opposition Nationalists were fleeing to Taiwan.)

The compression has helped ISIS in catching the opposition by surprise. One major reason for the initial dramatic gains of territory by ISIS in Iraq was that the Iraqi army was trained and equipped at the time to deal more with insurgency than with larger conventional attacks, which was the form that much of the ISIS offensive took.

In more recent months ISIS has lost ground, literally and especially in Iraq. The recapture of Ramadi by Iraqi government forces is part of that development and reflects an improved ability by those forces to deal with the late-phase conventional operations to which ISIS had moved more quickly than anyone expected.

ISIS has been exhibiting other strains and difficulties, including in trying to keep its fighters paid. The group's longer term prospects are still handicapped by its having no allies, and by a record of rule that is abhorrent to most people who have witnessed it directly and that has little appeal to anyone other than those on the ISIS payroll who are on the dispensing rather than the receiving end of the group's cruel variety of governance.

As ISIS declines, it is likely to resort increasingly to international terrorism. It will do so for the same general reasons that other movements that have been pushed backward along the Maoist timeline have focused on terrorism. If one is not succeeding in large conventional operations, one relies more on smaller asymmetric ones.

In the case of ISIS, increased reliance on international terrorism should be all the more apparent in that it represents a departure from the group's earlier focus, much different from the strategy of Al Qaeda, of concentrating on building and expanding its so-called caliphate. The terrorism will serve the

purpose of demonstrating continued vitality of the group and keeping it on the mental maps of potential recruits.

We will need to recognize such a change in emphasis for what it is, as well as recognizing the reasons for it. There will be a tendency to equate more ISIS international terrorism with greater overall ISIS strength. Bowing to that tendency will be an error in analysis, and it will play into the hands of the group.

The decline of ISIS will be violent. The violence should be taken seriously and must be dealt with, but when a decline is occurring we nonetheless should understand that it is in fact a decline.

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