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## INTO THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

THE UNITED STATES' *NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW* INDICATES THAT WE ARE ENTERING A PERIOD OF UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL HAZARD. CAN AN EMERGING GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS PREVENT GLOBAL DESTRUCTION?

Recent releases from the US archives have confirmed that in the darkest days of the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon proposed the use of nuclear weapons in order to gain victory, and that the principal opponent of the policy was Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger was no dove, to say the least; his opposition to the nuclear option had a *realpolitik* context that only a psychopathic type like Nixon could ignore. This was the growing fear and resistance amongst the public and political commentators towards the use of nuclear weapons. For twenty years since the use of the Bomb on Japan the development of nuclear weapons on a vast, almost inconceivable, scale hung over the world as an omnipresent threat. The sense of repulsion towards that option, the use of which would have consequences the scientific world were only beginning to comprehend, put those weapons out of consideration for strategic use, however tenuously. A considerable achievement, it was nevertheless one that was wrought from fear and foreboding rather than fully coming to terms with what these weapons mean for human culture.

Various attempts have since been made to reintroduce nuclear weapons in a more acceptable guise, the most notable being the tactical nuclear weapons of the 1980s that NATO tried to deploy against the USSR in Western Europe. Now, with the revelations of what is contained in the Pentagon's Nuclear Posture Review we find an entirely different situation, one that could justify the recreation of the persona of Henry Kissinger as a liberal peacenik. That even he would not match up in Washington today should indicate to us the kind of regime that now inhabits the US Capitol.

The Nuclear Posture Review is the latest response of the Pentagon to September 11. It goes far beyond the policy of missile defence which seeks to develop a missile shield that can repel (no more than) a few missiles from this or that 'rogue' state. That policy may be unrealistic but it has had its effects. It has already led to the casting aside of the only multi-lateral treaty that had placed real limits on the development and deployment of nuclear weapons. Even taken by itself

the 'missile shield' heralds a new phase of expansionist military development.

But it is now clear, after September 11, that the main threats to the United States do not lie in missile attacks from 'rogue' states. Rather they lie in the refusal of certain states to quell dissidence against the dominance of the United States in local and world affairs. These states may even seek ways to sustain or even manage such dissidence. And some of these dissident energies may turn into the use of terror against the United States. To respond to this situation, offensive attacks by the United States against recalcitrant states are now regarded by the Review as essential. These states include the three who make up the 'axis of evil' — Iraq, Iran, North Korea — but others have also joined the list, including China. And if these states have the audacity to resist, and in particular show a capacity 'to withstand non-nuclear attack', that is where we enter a new strategic phase. For in these circumstances, the Review argues, the United States should Nuke 'em!

During the struggles of the Cold War to bring nuclear weapons under some constraint the promise was made by the United States never to initiate their use. This was not much of a safeguard but it was definitely better than nothing. Now nuclear weapons are to be normalised, they are to be one of the options available to win a campaign against a resistant enemy. Nor does the report stop there. If the United States is attacked by terrorists or states using chemical or biological weapons, again the option should be available. Nuke 'em! And if there happens to be a 'surprising' military development then the United States should Nuke 'em too!

These post-September 11 strategies place the world in a situation of extreme peril. While the new power regime in the United States showed signs of its aggressive intentions before September 11, the attack on the US heartlands has legitimated policies that can only be described as beyond all previous strategic thought, even compared with the depths of the Cold War. Now we have practical justifications for the use of torture to obtain information and the relegation of 'dissidents'

and 'suspects' into situations where they are entirely at the mercy of the whims of their captors and have no legal rights whatsoever. In addition, we have the justification of the use of nuclear weapons to achieve given, or unspecified, ends. There is a regime in power that believes it only needs to answer to the most simplistic and base notions of survival rights. In six short months it has taken a barbarous turn — and it is very dangerous.

The questions and issues raised by this turn go far beyond the 'cycle of violence', as Noam Chomsky would put it, inherent in its response. That cycle is real enough but as a critique it neglects a much more serious situation. It is quite true that the threat to use weapons of mass destruction by terrorists and some states is real and potentially could be horrendous. But the point is that this 'cycle of violence' is of another order to previous forms of retaliation. It is an exterminist threat to our species — all species — and the earth.

The issue, then, is not that the US regime is now made up substantially of warmongers, though that is a very serious matter. Nor is the issue one of nuclear weapons as such. Nuclear weapons are merely the clearest example of a new category of weapon based in the techno-sciences that no longer targets enemy forces in warfare. These weapons are 'remarkable' in their capacity to work at a distance and by virtue of that they transcend the limits of warfare as such. They carry the potential to perfect the practice of Total War and to destroy our world. As weapons they are obviously violent, but more to the point, they are terroristic. They target civilian populations and the general conditions of life as a strategy of 'war'.

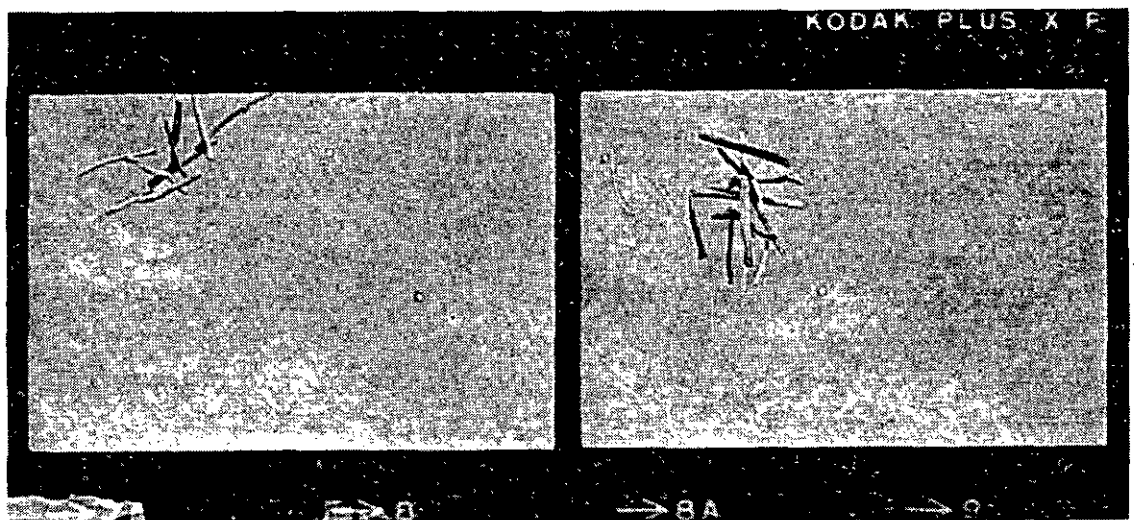
As a strategy, this has been a long time coming. The United States is obviously composed of diverse sectors of opinion, but this should not deflect us from noting the consistent refusal of US Administrations to face the consequences of a development of this kind. It was, of course, the first (and is so far the only) power to use nuclear weapons to destroy a people. When persons or states take a step that has shocking consequences, they sometimes step back and reassess. But the United States has never learnt. Rather its attitude towards this whole category of high-tech weaponry has been one of acquiring the latest development. This was certainly its attitude at the end of

World War Two.

When it emerged as a central power in the victory over the Nazis, its attitude towards the militarisation of science by the Germans was certainly not one of reassessment. Rather it set about converting many of these scientists to American citizenship. When it emerged victorious against Japan, it did not prosecute those ordinary and not so ordinary Japanese researchers responsible for Unit 731 in Manchuria. They had engaged in unspeakable forms of human experimentation, but what the United States wanted from these researchers was not justice. Rather, it wanted information. And it got it. That the recent anthrax outbreaks in the United States on most accounts seem to have emanated from internal sources, and most probably from military laboratories, speaks for itself.

The United States will not even accept the constraints of international law it helped form at Nuremberg after the fall of the Nazis. It has consistently opposed any such jurisdiction over its right to act. It has certainly never accepted that the constraints upon the use of high-tech weaponry are of another order. These weapons need far more than temporary political or bureaucratic constraints made for strategic purposes if they are to be controlled. They are weapons that call out for another order of ethics and morality. And in relation to their use the United States itself is the model of a 'rogue' state. For by its own definition it ignores the constraints inherent in ethical precepts necessary to sustain the community of nations.

The United States, and terrorists too, must be brought to see that there is no justification for the use of weapons of high-tech mass destruction. Progress on this question over the next ten years will only be achieved in the midst of intense danger for the world. It will take considerable leadership and creativity to turn around the behemoth that has now been unleashed.



detail from 'thrown sticks - four variations' by Peter Kennedy