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HST495

Nuclear Weapons Logic

On the surface, the logic dictating the use of nuclear weapons has changed since the end of the Cold War. The US, during the Cold War, had a “city for a city” or “eye for an eye” strategy. Many things have changed in almost three decades, and these things have forced a different perspective on things like nuclear deterrence and conventional nuclear policy.

One of the biggest concerns now that wasn’t as present towards the end of the Cold War is the possibility of terrorism. The idea that a terrorist organization could either steal or independently develop a nuclear weapon is particularly terrifying, as these organizations may not be subject to the same psychologies as state actors. These groups may have apocalyptic world views, or may otherwise not be concerned for their own safety, and thus the concept of deterrence may hold no bearing on their actions. The thought that a non-state actor, unconcerned for the fate of its populace or the world, could initiate a global nuclear conflict, is absolutely horrifying.

Non-state actors pose the biggest threat to world peace, and are the biggest difference between now and the end of the Cold War. In addition to everything else, in the event of an unexpected nuclear attack from a non-state actor on a state actor, retaliation becomes more complicated. If we are not able to properly identify whose weapon it was, or strike a target which will invariably affect a state actor in addition to the aggressor, the situation may become very complicated very quickly. These are issues that permeate the current nuclear landscape, and are very large, worrying question marks on the horizon that we may have to face in the not-so-distant future.