

Can Nuclear War Save the World?

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I can see only one way that humanity can deal with global warming. I sure hope I'm wrong.

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Hurricane Sandy is just the most recent in a series of extreme weather events which show that climate change is happening fast, really fast, faster even than most climatologists expected. The two greatest threats to humanity today are global warming and nuclear war. As I write this, at the end of the year 2012, yet another international climate change conference has ended in failure. Meanwhile, CO2 emissions continue to increase at an increasing rate. From 1990 to 2000, emissions increased by about 1% a year. From 2000 to the beginning of 2010, they increased at about 2 ½ % a year. From 2010 to 2011 alone CO2 emissions increased almost 6%. Let's admit it. The battle to stabilize CO2 levels in the atmosphere is over. We lost. The clowns we elected to govern us continue to assure us that the threat of global warming is manageable while they refuse to do anything to manage it. Like modern-day Neros, they seem determined to fiddle while our planet burns.

These clowns have actually made some progress in reducing the total number of nuclear weapons that are active (meaning armed, aimed, and ready to go). The threats from these weapons are not quite as desperate as those from global warming but they are still very severe, partly because more countries have acquired them. North Korea has just joined the lengthening list of countries that possess their very own atom bomb. As the list grows longer, the risk of nuclear war increases.

A great many Nervous Nellies, professional crepe hangers, and worry warts have lamented, bemoaned, and bewailed the fact that governments of the world are unable (in other words, unwilling) to deal with either of these threats. Not me. I consider myself an optimist and so I can appreciate a fact that has escaped most other people. The second threat can provide a solution to the first.

Some people pray that any future nuclear exchanges will be limited to just a few nations and a few nuclear missiles. Not me. I hope and believe that if two nations get into a nuclear dust-up allies of both countries will join in and dozens or even hundreds of mushroom clouds will sprout. Yes, yes I know billions of people will die but look on the bright side. Have you ever heard of nuclear winter? A couple hundred nuclear explosions might put so much dust into the air that it will block the sun's rays and cool the planet. I guess most experts think this cooling effect will be small but even a little bit will help. And we may get lucky. There are still over 20,000 nuclear bombs in the world, though only a little over 6,000 of these are active. What if half of these are used? If we get a little bit of cooling from a few hundred nuclear explosions, think how much we will get from 3,000.

When you think of all the people who may die from the effects of global warming I think we will come out ahead if we kill just a few billion in a massive nuclear war that ends up cooling the planet in the short run. And don't forget that a good nuclear war will destroy so much manufacturing capacity and power generation capacity that we can't possibly keep putting as much CO2 into the air as we have been. Anyway, with a few billion less people we won't need nearly as much power or manufactured goods so we won't have to keep producing them and using the atmosphere as a CO2 sewer.

Let me also make another important point. Global warming hurts the poor MORE than the rich. Rich countries have the money to protect their citizens from the worst effects of global warming while poor countries do not. Therefore, most of those who die from global warming will be poor people living in poor countries. That doesn't sound very fair does it?

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On the other hand, nuclear missiles are aimed at big cities and other population centers, mostly in developed countries where the wealthier people live. Nuclear war will kill a lot of the poor but it will also probably kill even more of the rich. You might say nuclear war is a more fair way to kill millions than global warming. Iâ€™m all for that. See how you can find silver linings in the futureâ€™s dark clouds if you just keep a positive mental attitude? Iâ€™ll bet you feel better about the future already.

Letâ€™s face it, governments are not going to force their people to cut CO2 emissions. If we donâ€™t want to see half the seacoast cities on the planet drowned, if we donâ€™t relish the idea of malaria and dengue fever epidemics in Northern Europe, Siberia and Canada, if we donâ€™t want to have to run air conditioners in December while millions in poor countries die of the heat, we really have only one hope, nuclear winter. So the next time you hear that another belligerent and bellicose country has gotten nuclear weapons, donâ€™t be scared. Just remember the chance of nuclear winter has just increased.

The only question that worries me now is, "Will nuclear war come in time?" Let us pray that it will. Here are some steps we can take to ensure a speedy nuclear holocaust. First, continue to promote the most important principle of all nuclear negotiations: Nuclear weapons must be eliminated from every country but our own. If we donâ€™t have these weapons we must get them. If we have these weapons we must keep them. As long as all parties cling to this principle, nuclear war is inevitable. Second, continue to promote the many regional wars currently costing lives around the globe. As countries with nuclear weapons engage in conventional warfare, there is always the chance it will escalate. Finally, and most importantly, continue to be complacent. Maybe Iâ€™m too optimistic but I think if we just relax and let things continue on their present path, its only a question of time before the mushroom clouds sprout and shortly thereafter, the earth will cool down, maybe only a little but maybe a lot.

What I am saying seems insane, and it is. I guess the most sane and sensible thing to do is to try to prevent nuclear war so that we can continue to consume more fossil fuel and continue to use our air as a CO2 toilet. Eventually, our climate will reach a tipping point, if we havenâ€™t already reached it. This will mean runaway planetary warming that we cannot stop. When this happens, the long-term effects may make nuclear war seem like a birthday present.

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