

1-16-1998

Trends. A New Look at the New Look: Nuclear Weapons and National Security

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Recommended Citation

Editor (1998) "Trends. A New Look at the New Look: Nuclear Weapons and National Security," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol4/iss2/4>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. A New Look at the New Look: Nuclear Weapons and National Security

Author: Editor

Volume: 4

Issue: 2

Date: 1998-01-16

Keywords: United States, Military, Nuclear Weapons, National Security, Russia

The term New Look was ascribed to United States (US) military policy during the first and--less accurately--to the second Eisenhower administrations. One significant component involved heavy reliance on nuclear weapons for national security. An economic rationale was that this reliance would preclude the need for a fifth to a quarter of gross national product to be allocated for military expenditures. Political and sociocultural rationales were that this reliance would less likely distort US values and quality of life.

Given the present economic difficulties of Russia, these difficulties' political and sociocultural destabilizing potential, and Russia's obvious military difficulties with conventional forces, should the New Look be given a new look by Russian leaders as a viable contemporary defense policy? A positive feature would be the ineluctable correlation between significant nuclear assets and credibility as a major foreign power. This credibility can facilitate obtaining foreign aid and investment to bolster the economic component of security. This credibility also helps ensure that the political sensitivities of Russia are taken seriously concerning military security issues like expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations' authorization of military initiatives. Also, much as NATO forces were small compared with those of the Eastern Bloc in the 1950s, today's Russian conventional forces exhibit shortfalls in financial support and morale compared with the forces of many other countries. This fact might heighten the credibility of using nuclear weapons in a military crisis--thereby increasing military, economic, and political leverage with other countries. Moreover, the political and sociocultural image of Russians as a great people could artfully be maintained.

However, there are at least two negative features of a resurrection of the New Look for Russia. First, the New Look (for the US) seemed to be most credible when the US had a huge nuclear weapons superiority over all its real and potential adversaries and embraced the nuclear doctrine of massive retaliation. Such superiority is not exhibited by the Russia of today. Second, as with the US of the 1950s, Russia would be locked into an all-or-nothing response during a military crisis that could have its own peculiar and troubling moral-strategic calculus.

Should today's US security policy towards Russia include helping build up Russian conventional forces? Building down Russian nuclear assets? Attending less to Russian military assets than economic ones? Attempting to turn Russia into the Costa Rica of Eurasia? A new look at the New Look suggests that new thinking is required by those who dare to think the unthinkable. (See Beer, F.A. (1981). Controlling nuclear weapons: The evolution of morality, politics, and science. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 20, 323-342; Frank, J.D. (1983). Nuclear arms and pre-nuclear leaders: Sociopsychological aspects of the nuclear arms race. *Political Psychology*, 4, 393-408; Russia's nuclear temptation. (January 12, 1998). *The New York Times*, p. A20; Wessells, M. (1995). Social psychological determinants of nuclear proliferation: A dual process analysis. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 1, 49-65.)