

The Revolution that Failed

The study of nuclear weapons is dominated by a single theory – that of the nuclear revolution, or Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Although theorists of MAD largely perceive nuclear competition as irrational and destined for permanent stalemate, the nuclear arms race between superpowers during the second half of the Cold War is a glaring anomaly that flies in the face of MAD’s logic.

In this detailed account, Brendan Rittenhouse Green presents an alternate explanation for how the United States navigated nuclear stalemate during the Cold War. Motivated by the theoretical and empirical puzzles of the Cold War arms race, Green explores the technological, perceptual, and “constitutional fitness” incentives that were the driving forces behind US nuclear competition.

Green hypothesizes that states can gain peacetime benefits from effective nuclear competition, including reducing the risk of crises, bolstering alliance cohesion, and more. He concludes that the lessons of the Cold War arms race remain relevant today: they will influence the coming era of great power competition and could potentially lead to more aggressive US nuclear policies in the future.

Brendan Rittenhouse Green writes on issues of nuclear strategy, American foreign policy, and grand strategy. His scholarly articles have appeared in journals such as *International Security* and *Security Studies*, and have received awards from the *Journal of Strategic Studies* and the American Political Science Association.

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The Revolution that Failed

Nuclear Competition, Arms Control, and the Cold War

BRENDAN RITTENHOUSE GREEN

University of Cincinnati



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*For my beloved sister, Darcy – who deserves a better brother,
and
For Carrie, Nat, and Mary Kate – whose uncle aims to spoil them.*

Therefore, since the world has still
Much good, but much less good than ill,
And while the sun and moon endure
Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure,
I'd face it as a wise man would,
And train for ill and not for good.

'Tis true, the stuff I bring for sale
Is not so brisk a brew as ale:
Out of a stem that scored the hand
I wrung it in a weary land.
But take it: if the smack is sour,
The better for the embittered hour;
It should do good to heart and head
When your soul is in my soul's stead;
And I will friend you, if I may,
In the dark and cloudy day.

A. E. Housman, LXII in A Shropshire Lad

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Acknowledgments

Nearly seventy years and many thousands of pages of analysis after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is probably not possible to say anything genuinely novel about nuclear weapons. I do not really suppose that I have done so in this study. It may be possible to make older ideas familiar again, to accentuate their underappreciated features, and in doing so cast new light upon the politics of nuclear weapons. My hope is that I have accomplished something like this here, but readers must make their own judgment. In any case, it surely would have been impossible for me to say anything at all about nuclear weapons without the unflagging support of my friends and mentors. The many errors that remain, however, are mine alone.

Pride of place belongs to Austin Long, whose name, by rights, ought to appear alongside mine on the cover of this book. Not only did he husband me through graduate school, but he picked me up off the slag heap of the academic job market and repurposed me for better tasks. Austin suggested that we should begin writing a piece about nuclear strategy, based on a number of previous conversations. “At minimum,” he pointed out, “it will give you something else to talk about on the job market.” It did indeed, and much else besides. That collaboration resulted in three papers, two research grants, an unreasonable amount of attention for our ideas, and some modest accolades. Suffice it to say, Austin’s influence has suffused throughout this project from its beginning to its end. My gratitude to him is without measure. My esteem for him cannot be captured with words.

A second source of the ideas in this book is Owen Coté, Jr. I can say, without any exaggeration, that Owen taught me everything I know about nuclear weapons. The conversations that launched my collaboration with Austin were actually multi-person affairs, chaired by Owen, and held in numerous Cambridge haunts after hours. In these dens of iniquity, I imbibed many of the heresies about the nuclear balance that appear in these pages, as well as other potent potables. Much later, during my Stanton year at MIT, I benefited from a series of long and detailed conversations with Owen about the substance

of this book, many of which we even conducted sober. He was also kind enough to read Chapter 2 and provide numerous suggestions. It has, if not quite his *imprimatur*, then at least a *nihil obstat*. I am deeply indebted to him for his wisdom, and for many thousand dollars' worth of whisky and steak when I was a poor graduate student, but most of all for his friendship.

My intellectual hero is, without a doubt, Marc Trachtenberg. I frequently “joke” that much of my career has consisted of polishing up his brilliant insights and presenting them as my own. I was therefore thrilled that Marc gave Austin and me numerous comments on our essays as soon as we began to present them publicly. His contribution to this particular project has been immense. I sent him the penultimate version of the manuscript, when the front end was still a dense thicket of gibberish, figuring that at least I would get some good comments on the historical chapters. Within forty-eight hours, I had in my e-mail an eight-page, single-spaced memo, containing exactly one paragraph on the historical chapters, and a fully formed battle plan for fixing the most difficult problems in the book. In short order Marc hosted me at UCLA for a daylong face-to-face discussion of the manuscript, where he also dispensed much other good advice on life, research, and academia. Marc is a rare figure indeed: his titanic scholarly contributions are actually exceeded by his personal generosity and dedicated mentorship. I can only gesture at the scale of my obligations to him. He is one of the discipline's great spirits.

Of course, actually producing this study required, first and foremost, not going barking mad during the research and writing process. It would be difficult to overstate the role played by Caitlin Talmadge in ensuring that happy outcome. Caitlin has been a fast friend since graduate school. In addition to being a tremendous scholar of military affairs, she is also a keen student of my psyche. Caitlin took great care to monitor my well-being from more than 500 miles away, even as she juggled a growing family, changed jobs, and produced fantastic research. On the days when I was bleakly contemplating my future in manual labor, she was always there with encouragement and friendship. After watching me briefly flounder as I tried to organize a book conference, she simply seized the reins and implemented all logistical matters flawlessly. It goes without saying that Caitlin gave me very considerable intellectual assistance as well. She could have hardly done otherwise, having read more versions of the manuscript than anyone, usually at inconvenient times for her. Evidence of Caitlin's keen attention can be found throughout these pages, and across my personality. I am profoundly devoted to her.

At a key point in the manuscript's production, I sent out a call for suicide volunteers to read an early draft. The intellectual desolation of this version was oddly juxtaposed against the teeming jungle of its clotted prose, and it took a hardy soul indeed to machete through it. The following heroes stepped up: Paul Avey, Stacie Goddard, Galen Jackson, Jon Lindsay, Austin Long, Paul MacDonald, Joshua Shiffrinson, and Caitlin Talmadge. They each provided incredibly helpful suggestions whose acuity was especially welcome at this

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formative stage. Nobly volunteering to read later drafts, which I then failed to send, were Mark Bell, Jasen Castillo, Christopher Clary, and Vipin Narang. Despite my incompetence, I have been fortunate to benefit from conversations with all of them.

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The University of Cincinnati has proven a wonderful home to teach and do research. It is basically the only political science department I have ever heard of that is not in some way dysfunctional. This is at least partially due to the exemplary leadership of Richard Harknett as department chair. He and the senior faculty went out of their way to remove administrative and service burdens from me, and allow me to take opportunities that have made this book possible. My graduate student, Jelena Vičić, provided excellent research assistance. My friend Andrew Lewis and his lovely family were a major source of cheer and comfort during the writing of this book. I am very appreciative of all of my Cincinnati colleagues.

How can I possibly express my love and gratitude for my family? They are my rock, my shield, the foundation of everything that I am. John and Lynn Green are the best parents a boy could have, and a continual font of inspiration and consolation. My sister Darcy Lutz and her amazing family are a treasure to me. This book is dedicated to them.

* * * * *

In the end, it is hard for me to know what to make of this book, other than that it is far too long. I suppose I am confident only that it reflects my many flaws and failings, and also whatever usefulness I may possess. A man can hope for little better in this life. And so, pending the return of the Lord – with hair like snow, eyes a flame of fire, feet like burnished bronze, and a voice like the roar of many waters – to complete the redemption of the world, me, and even this book, I take my leave of it. It remains to readers to make of it what they will.

*B. R. G. Cincinnati,
Ohio Second Sunday of Easter
Anno Domini, 2019*