

# Civil Defense—the New Debate

The possibility of a new program for strengthening the U.S. civil defense against nuclear attack has been raised in Washington recently. Because the editors of *Worldview* believe a public debate on the program would be useful, we asked a number of people to respond to one or more of the following questions:

1. Do you understand it to be the policy of the Carter administration to give major priority to civil defense in the over-all defense posture of this country?
2. Would such a direction be a positive or negative factor in terms of (a) American security and (b) reducing the chances of nuclear war? Why?
3. What is different now from the debate over civil defense against nuclear attack that took place in the late Fifties and early Sixties?
4. What are the ethical considerations you believe are relevant to the above questions?

## New Situation, New Response

Paul H. Nitze

George Kennan, in an interview published by the *New York Times Magazine*, affirmed the proposition that it is better to be "Red than dead." Since the end of World War II the United States has been engaged in a successful effort to demonstrate that the choice thus implied is wrong. We have demonstrated, at least to date, that it is not necessary to be either "Red or dead"; it has been possible both to remain free and to avoid a nuclear war. The essential task is to continue so to do.

In the last half of the 1950's, at the time of Sputnik, serious doubts arose as to whether a time would shortly arise when that issue—"Red or dead"—could become serious. It had not been a serious choice during the period when we had a nuclear monopoly, or even when we had an overwhelming and stable nuclear deterrent. But with the Soviet development of ICBMs, the technological practicality of which was first demonstrated by Sputnik, it became possible, perhaps probable, that the "better Red than dead" issue would arise in all seriousness in a few years.

The alternative solution originally given most attention was the initiation of a U.S. civil defense program. The Gaither Committee, a study group appointed by President Eisenhower, came to the conclusion that such a program could indeed be effective both in enhancing deterrence and greatly reducing casualties if deterrence were to fail. They also concluded, however, that higher priority should be given to immediate measures to improve the survivability of our strategic bomber crews so that a significant portion could be continuously on alert, and by assuring that the alert bombers could get off the ground in the time provided by the warning system. It was recommended that this be coordinated with a program to assure that as soon as possible we

deploy ICBMs in dispersed hardened silos and SLBMs in hard-to-find submarines at sea. An elaborate civil defense program was given second priority. The first priority recommendations of the Gaither Committee were put into effect.

The executive branch concurrently initiated a modest civil defense program designed to provide warning, identify and mark already existing shelter spaces, and partially stock them with supplies. New shelter construction was left to individual initiative. By 1962 we had deployed sufficient ICBMs in dispersed and hardened silos and enough Polaris submarine-based launchers to provide assured crisis stability and high-quality deterrence. After that time civil defense could be, and was viewed as, a low-priority requirement. To many it became, unjustifiably, a cause for derision.

Today the situation has changed; the Soviet Union has for a decade or more been devoting far greater effort to its strategic offensive capabilities than have we. We cut back our program to a third, if measured in constant dollars, of what it averaged during the six years from 1956 to 1962. The Soviet program has expanded to a point at which it is now estimated to be triple ours. There is now little doubt that our previous nuclear strategic superiority has been eliminated. Many, myself included, believe we are heading into a period of serious strategic inferiority and instability. Authorities in the executive branch take a less serious view than I, but they too are concerned. The "better Red than dead" or "better dead than Red" dilemma is again a serious concern.

Under these circumstances the question arises whether we should again consider a more active civil defense program. The executive branch is putting priority on measures to assure the continuing survivability, endurance, and capability of our ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers. I wish the executive branch were doing even more in that direction and had acted earlier. In addition the executive branch is reported to be considering doubling, or thereabouts, the current civil defense program of \$90 million a year. In other words, they are considering adding to our civil defense program an

THE HONORABLE PAUL H. NITZE, who has held many high government positions, served until 1974 as the representative of the Secretary of Defense to the United States Delegation to SALT. He is Director of Policy Studies of the Committee on the Present Danger.

amount approximating .01 per cent of our overall defense budget. The purpose of this increased civil defense spending would be to give the United States in the event of a serious crisis the ability to evacuate most of our urban population to the countryside. The executive branch estimates that there are circumstances, were deterrence to fail, in which such measures would enable most of our population to survive. The main point, however, is that such a capability could add to deterrence and thus help us continue to avoid the "Red or dead" dilemma.

It is suggested that the Carter administration is thereby giving major priority to civil defense and that this raises ethical questions. The first part of the suggestion is evident nonsense; how can an item constituting .01 per cent of the defense budget be a major priority? A more pertinent question is whether it is enough to be effective. The second part of the question is, however, relevant.

The second part suggests it is somehow immoral to think about nuclear war and, having thought, to take those considered steps designed to improve the quality

of our nuclear deterrent. I am confused by this suggestion. Is it based on the hypothesis that it is wrong to take measures designed to avoid the "better Red than dead" dilemma? Or on the hypothesis that it is too late to make such measures effective and that we must now agree with George Kennan that it is "better to be Red than dead"? A corollary of that hypothesis would appear to be that accommodation of the new Soviet imperium is the best course available to us, even if such a course were to lead to the U.S. subjecting itself to the Kremlin's will. Perhaps the hypothesis is that the more dreadful we make the consequences of a nuclear war to ourselves, the more certain we will be to ensure that the president has no real alternative in a crisis but to surrender. To do otherwise would be to bring *Götterdämmerung* down upon ourselves, even though the Soviet Union, through well-designed military and defense programs, would suffer casualties perhaps a tenth of ours.

I await with interest the other articles in this series. I trust they will contribute to clarifying the hypotheses upon which the ethical issues should be judged.

## To Clarify the Issue

Hans J. Morgenthau

**I**t is impossible to state with assurance what the policy of the Carter administration is with regard to civil defense. As in so many other fields of policy, the policy of the Carter administration with regard to civil defense is contradictory in different respects. Successive statements of the same officials contradict each other. The statements of different officials contradict each other. Official statements are contradicted by the actual policy pursued. The realities of the situation militate against the policy announced.

For the purpose of clarifying the issue let us assume that the administration is committed to a greatly expanded civil defense effort over several years, meaning primarily the evacuation of the bulk of the civilian population from the cities. Such a policy is, according to the *New York Times*, "farcical" on several grounds.

First, where is the civilian population to be evacuated to? Let us suppose the goal of the evacuation would be Upstate New York and Connecticut. Has anybody visualized the problems of logistics such a move would entail? Since a comprehensive shelter program appears to be excluded, where would these millions of people find shelter and nourishment, even if they were able to overcome the problems of chaotic mass traffic? Even if all these problems were overcome, the enemy need only change slightly the targets of a few of its multimegaton missiles in order to put the evacuated millions out of

commission. The only change the evacuation of the civilian population would bring about would be the place of demise. The city populations, instead of dying in their respective cities, would be annihilated in their respective places of evacuation. Die they must, if not at home, so at their place of refuge; if not through blast, then through fire and fallout.

This argument supposes that evacuees arrive at their destination according to plan. But what if the evacuees of neighboring cities arrive at the same destination? If, for instance, the evacuees of Boston meet those of Hartford? Are we not going to be witness to a war of all against all, everybody trying to get to a place of safety before everybody else, and everybody fighting everybody tooth and nail, since allegedly sheer survival is at stake?

However, we are only at the beginning of our troubles. So far we have dealt with what one might call the technical problems of evacuation, which appear to be insurmountable. Now let us take a look at the military and political context. Soviet military doctrine stresses the importance of surprise in military operations, especially nuclear war. Evacuation would signal to an enemy the likelihood of nuclear war, either perceived as an enemy move or intended by the evacuating government. Are the prospective belligerents likely to wait until the evacuation is completed, or are they going to start the nuclear war as soon as the evacuation is started? Evacuation would be tantamount to an Act of War, forcing the hand of one or the other, or more likely of both of the prospective belligerents. Far from being a factor in

preventing nuclear war, evacuation would be a factor in making it inevitable; for it would signal to all concerned that the evacuating government is ready for nuclear war.

The argument against evacuation is similar to that made against shelters almost two decades ago. The idea of evacuation assumes that nuclear war is similar to conventional war, only more destructive than the latter.

In truth, nuclear war, by virtue of its unimaginable destructiveness, is qualitatively different from conventional war. In conventional war you can rationally resort to evacuation and shelters. In nuclear war there is no place to hide. You have to prevent it in order to avoid destruction. Once deterrence has failed, only one question remains: How do you want to die—at home or elsewhere, in a shelter or above ground?

## Some Moral Reflections

James T. Johnson

**T**here can simply be no doubt that protection of noncombatants is a major priority of the Western tradition on warfare, generally called the "just war" tradition. Its general concerns are two: to define when the violence of war is allowable (the problem of justification) and to set limits to what may be done in even a just war (the problem of limitation). Paul Ramsey, for example, finds both these concerns in the thought of Augustine of Hippo and argues that for him and for Christian just war theory generally they should be regarded as requirements of divine love. A Christian, on this view, has a duty in love to protect innocent persons being unjustly threatened by violence or subjected to it, and he may utilize counterviolence, if necessary, to effect such a defense. At the same time, the use of such counterviolence is limited by a number of restraints also derived from love, foremost of which is a duty also toward the unjust assailant not to harm him any more than necessary to defend his victim.

A similar pattern of reasoning emerges in Jewish tradition. Talmudic ethics allows use of violence against one who pursues with the intent of doing harm; yet the counterviolence that is permitted is limited by two constraints: First, one may do no worse to the pursuer than what he seeks to do, and, second, one may do no more than needed to make the pursuer leave off his evil intention. Secular contributions to Western just war tradition have provided analogous ideas: The medieval code of chivalry, for example, defined the knight as having a duty to protect noncombatants, while the concept of limited war originally defined and put into practice by such military theorists as Frederick the Great sought to ensure absolute protection of noncombatants outside a combat area and relative protection inside such an area. The requirements of defending noncombatants against the ravages of war is thus at the very core of Western thought on how war can be a moral enterprise.

Still, there are numerous ways to defend against violence: running away or, more generally, putting the threatened out of reach of the threatener; interposing an

impregnable shield between threatener and threatened; warding off the attack of an assailant with skillful parries; fighting back or striking pre-emptively in an attempt to disarm or disable the assailant; threatening to retaliate violently if the original threat is carried through. If all the above methods would be equally effective in a given situation, then the sequence of this list defines an order of moral priority among these methods: Those presented first are preferable to those presented later.

The old civil defense program, which aimed at building shelters to protect city populations against nuclear blast and fallout, was a form of shield defense, while the new program recently announced by the Carter administration represents an attempt to defend by putting threatened noncombatants out of reach of the violence of nuclear attack. Similarly, ABMs constitute a defense oriented at fighting back with intent to disarm, while mutual assured destruction (MAD) strategy is a version of defense by the threat of retaliation. Prima facie, the Western just war tradition would seem to favor civil defense programs over these last types of defense against countercity nuclear attack, since civil defense aims to maximize the restraints on use of violence in defense. But such a prima facie judgment would be, in this case, wrong.

Just war tradition permits violence if it is necessary to an effectual defense, and such violence is allowed up to and including the level of violence employed by the "unjust" or "pursuing" attacker. It is clear that in this moral tradition one may kill if necessary to prevent an innocent person from being killed. The permission to resort to such a response in kind includes permission to threaten to do so. Thus we are all well off the scent if we take the concern of just war tradition to defend noncombatants to rule out the threat of retaliation, or if we take it to imply that programs of civil defense, which are inherently nonviolent, are *ipso facto* to be preferred over means of defense that threaten violence against the attacker. This tradition is concerned with the *protection* of noncombatants, and that requires an *effective* defense. This in turn requires that moral analysis take into account the relative effectiveness of various possible modes of defense as well as their abstract moral preferability in terms of the level of violence each entails.

The only thing that can be said in favor of mutual assured destruction as a defensive strategy is that for quite some time now it has worked to help prevent a nuclear war. But that is a great deal to say for it. And given the proposed scale of the Carter civil defense program, this program will not replace such a strategy of retaliation but can only supplement it. Were this new program the leading edge of an effort to substitute civil defense entirely for MAD, we would have to weigh the

implications of such a substitution. But as a supplement to existing strategic defense policy, it presumably aims at maintaining a balance between the superpowers as to what level of destruction could be sustained by their societies in the event of a nuclear interchange. Thus it is an effort to bolster the stalemate. A full moral analysis of this new civil defense program therefore would have to weigh it within this larger context of a continuing reliance on defense by retaliatory threat.

## Reasons in Opposition

John C. Bennett

**B**efore our government embarks on the proposed forms of civil defense I hope that the following reasons for *not* doing so will be taken very seriously.

Preparations for the evacuation of cities in a society as free as ours would involve such drastic actions that they would be more of a signal than we would intend of our readiness for nuclear war. Combined with any build-up of strategic nuclear arms that suggested a first-strike capability to the other side, they would be more provocative than appears to us, to whom they would seem innocent and defensive. This reminds me of the account by Thucydides of the great pains the Athenians took to conceal from the Spartans the fact that they were rebuilding their walls after the Persian wars. What could be more innocent and defensive than a wall!

Greater account must be taken of the fears of the Soviet Union. In the long run they may fear China more than the U.S. We are their powerful adversary, who for decades expressed, more unofficially than officially, hostility to the Soviet Union. How much of a residue there is in the USSR of a dogmatic belief in the inevitability of war between the two systems, I do not know. A two-front war is in their minds, and they even speak of China as an eastern member of NATO. They know that the countries of Eastern Europe that are supposed to be in their camp are not reliable allies. They even fear the U.S. may come to have a powerful presence in Iran. There is in the background something the Russians remember and exaggerate and we have forgotten: the American military presence in Siberia in 1917-20. It is also not forgotten that the U.S. is the only nation ever to use atomic bombs, that most of the victims were civilians, and that the U.S. since World War II has dropped more bombs on other nations than have the rest of the nations combined. We do not see ourselves in this light at all. Indeed, what others see is quite out of line with our own present intentions as a nation. But fears and provocations depend on what others see.

The second reason for not going ahead is what such a

form of civil defense as the preparation to evacuate cities would do to our *own* people. Again, this would necessitate taking such authoritarian measures in a nation so unaccustomed to them as to make a great impression on the American people, leading them to become accustomed to nuclear war as more than a remote possibility. Official explanations, which in such matters always seem too optimistic, might create the sense that nuclear war could be survived, not only by a large majority of our people, but also by our free institutions and other aspects of our life that we believe most worth defending. Such an outcome is highly doubtful. The secondary effects of nuclear explosions would be played down, and the more remote genetic effects on future generations would not be considered. It might be better to die instantly in Manhattan than slowly in New Jersey. We cannot trust the Pentagon's weighing of the intangible effects of nuclear war.

---

**"... better to die instantly in Manhattan than slowly in New Jersey."**

---

Also, participation by the people in such preparations might well increase our own fear of the Russians and our hostility toward them. We have long had a tendency to be obsessed by a combination of anticommunism and anti-Sovietism, but in recent years we have in large measure moved away from it. For the American people once more to be controlled by this obsession would distort our policy and increase anxieties on the other side. I fear that preparations for evacuation of cities that are thorough enough to be significant would signal the end of détente and of any promise of curtailing the arms race. This would be true even if we learned that Russia's more authoritarian government had taken some steps to prepare to evacuate its cities. It could do this with far less mind-changing dislocations than could our government. Before estimating its significance, we should recognize the grounds I have mentioned for Russian fears and its history of invasion by others.

---

JOHN C. BENNETT, a member of the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, is former President of Union Theological Seminary in New York.

# The Misguided Concept

Thomas J. Downey

**A**nyone who believes that the Soviet Union, because of its civil defense program, is better able to survive a nuclear war than the United States is totally misguided. And anyone willing to accept such a foolish argument is blind to three basic facts.

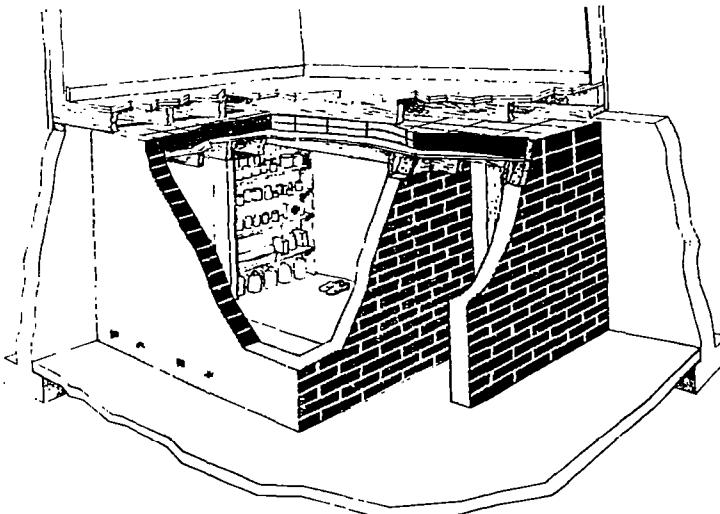
First, the massive urban evacuation program would have limited effectiveness in reducing the disastrous effects of a nuclear attack on the general population, even supposing that such a scheme could be effectively carried out on a national scale. Second, targeting for population destruction is not in any case a primary goal of our current strategic planning. Third, if Soviet strategic planners are contemplating a first-strike scenario against the United States (as many American hawks state in their arguments for an American civil defense evacuation scheme), they would be unable to employ their urban evacuation plan, because to do so would obviously destroy the element of surprise needed for any first strike to succeed.

What would Soviet urban evacuation on a massive scale—if it could actually be accomplished with Russia's very limited transportation system—actually accomplish? Millions of city dwellers fleeing to the countryside would present tremendous logistical problems even under the best of conditions, and the Russian climate and terrain are not noted for mildness and hospitality. An American nuclear counterstrike would be designed to destroy the Russian industrial base for waging war and the entire economic structure of the enemy for recovery. It is presently estimated that two-thirds of the Soviet industrial base would be destroyed within hours. With a shattered economic base, a crippled transportation system, and the “means of production” in ashes, Soviet evacuees would be left with only stockpiled food, medicine, and heating oil. There would be no hope of replenishing these essentials. Furthermore, flight to rural areas is no defense against drifting clouds of nuclear radiation; and radiation, not blast effect, is the primary cause of death in the civilian population, whether urban or rural. Also, if a counterstrike occurred before evacuation were complete, the civilian evacuees would be much more vulnerable on the road than they would have been at home. It should be remembered too that food-producing areas are also important strategic targets, and this further limits the imagined safety of flight to the countryside.

Though nuclear-targeting doctrine in the Seventies does not have the aim of slaughtering the civilian population, a very high proportion of the population in any country receiving a nuclear attack would be killed, in the attack and from its aftereffects, whether they fled the urban areas or not. Neither Russia nor the United States

can possibly hope to protect its civilian population to the extent that nuclear confrontation could be thought safe. Nuclear war would be the greatest possible mistake for both sides.

It would be morally irresponsible to lead the American people to believe that safety from a nuclear attack could be found through evacuation. Conversely, we must not give the Soviet Union the impression that we believe they have an advantage or a chance of survival because of their evacuation program. They do not; and, furthermore, any use they might make of evacuation would be crisis destabilizing, accelerating toward conflict. In the event of a crisis situation—say, Soviet inter-



**Civil Defense the Last Time Around**

Basement Concrete-Block Fallout Shelter (Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization diagram). A pair of slippers lies in readiness for the shelter's one (!?) inhabitant.

ference with the supply of oil to the West from the Persian Gulf—the United States must make it abundantly clear to the Soviets that an implementation of their urban evacuation program would be seen as a prelude to a strike against us and that our nuclear forces would be put on alert accordingly. If the U.S. had an evacuation scheme and put it into effect, the Russians would no doubt go on alert, and the movement toward nuclear confrontation would be similarly accelerated. Not only is civil defense evacuation ineffective in protecting the general population and useless in planning a surprise first strike, it could actually increase the risk of nuclear war in a crisis confrontation.

Undoubtedly, serious attention must continue to be given to civil defense preparedness, but rather than expending time, energy, and money in planning a massive evacuation scheme, simply because “the Russians are doing it,” I believe that our civil defense efforts would be better served by planning to maintain calm and rational order in American cities in a crisis, whether caused by threat of war or natural disaster. In the event of a serious confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR the main concern of American civil defense authorities should not be herding our urban citizens into the countryside but, rather, maintaining safety and order in our cities and preventing a panic-stricken chaotic flight to the ill-conceived safety of the countryside.

# The Illusion of Protection

Richard J. Barnet

**T**he policy of the Carter administration is to increase substantially civil defense expenditures. In terms of money it is not a "majority priority," since the administration plans to lock us into overall military expenditures on the order of \$1.8 trillion in 1977 dollars by 1988. The justification for the increased civil defense expenditure is that it is a "modest" increase in response to demands for a much bigger program and a counter to the Soviet program. There is a strong pork barrel element in the program too. Just as civil defense was the justification for building the nation's highway system, it is now being quietly presented to local officials as a way to get some money into local communities in a time of austerity. It is also a way to buy off opposition to a SALT treaty, or so it is thought.

All such justifications for the program are utterly irresponsible. To spend billions on civil defense when crucial programs essential to the strength of the nation are being slashed is pathological. Appeasing critics of the SALT treaty by throwing them a "harmless" bone is self-defeating, for the program lends credibility to *their* view of reality, not that of the treaty advocates, and creates a climate in which it is easier to defeat the treaty.

The idea that we should "match" the Soviets, or even, within very broad limits, be influenced by what they do in civil defense, is puerile. If they were developing a program that suggested an ability or an intent to eliminate virtually all civilian casualties, that would be cause for concern. It would suggest an effort to create what we used to call a "credible first-strike posture." But that is not the case. The Soviet program becomes threatening only if we assume that the leaders are prepared to sacrifice a substantial portion of their population, or more. For their program, as the CIA has reported, cannot protect their population. According to PRM-10, a study of the National Security Council, the Soviets would suffer more than a hundred million casualties in a nuclear war. The Soviets spend money many ways the U.S. would be foolish to imitate. Civil defense is one of them.

A civil defense program is a waste of money not only because it cannot protect the society from the effects of a nuclear war, it is harmful because it fosters the illusion that Americans can be "protected." It causes the government to make outrageous claims such as the one that 140 million Americans can be saved by evacuating the cities (anyone who has ever tried to leave a city in a normal holiday weekend, let alone a nuclear alert, knows how easy *that* is). It reinforces the fatalism and acceptance of nuclear holocaust, which is the most powerful dynamic pushing us toward the ultimate catastrophe. If nuclear war is initiated, it will be because those who start it believe that it cannot be avoided. Only an insane

leader of the U.S. or the USSR would choose nuclear war over peace. No conceivable national interest on either side would justify the risk. But if the choice is believed to be nuclear war now or nuclear war later, then the decision to pre-empt or to "prevent" the more terrible future war might seem plausible. The drill for death that seems so pathological when done on a small scale, as at Jonestown, brings us closer to war because it conditions us to accept the inevitability of war. The most important effects of the civil defense program are not physical. The program cannot be large enough to avert an unimaginable catastrophe or to assure the survival of a democratic society in the United States. The significance is psychological. It is a crucial mechanism for helping brainwash a generation into accepting the lethal myth that there is no alternative to security but to hide.

I remember a popular book about Nazi Germany called *Education for Death*. It was one of the most telling critiques of the moral bankruptcy of a regime that preached the inevitability of war and drilled the whole society into accepting that belief. Anything that legitimizes nuclear war by perpetuating the illusion that it is simply an extension of old-fashioned war and not an historic watershed betrays an arrogant disregard for the future of the planet. We are only beginning to understand that the ecological effects of the productive system are much more serious than previously believed, because the life-support systems—air, water, soil, etc.—are interlocking. We have no idea of the real extent or duration of the damage caused by irradiating vast areas of the planet and no notion of the real harm it would do to future generations. All we can be reasonably sure of is that the effects will be worse than we plan for. To foster the belief that nuclear war is "manageable" or "winnable" or justified for any political purpose is a way of avoiding the real ethical issue—that this generation is not the owner of the earth, only a steward or a trustee. To assert the right to destroy it is the ultimate blasphemy.

## Some Possible Problems

David T. Johnson

**W**hile the Carter administration is clearly paying more attention to civil defense and will undoubtedly request more funding for crisis-relocation planning, this does not yet constitute giving "major priority" to civil defense. Most policymakers seem to believe civil defense can play only a very limited role in mitigating the effects of nuclear weapons.

Many of the questions related to the desirability or undesirability of more stress on civil defense are essentially unanswerable. We simply cannot know with assurance how it will affect U.S. security or the chances of

nuclear war. Plausible points can be made on both sides, but it is mostly speculation. Nobody who feels strongly one way or the other is likely to have his views changed. The debate will be predictably inconclusive.

What masquerades as rational decisionmaking on most issues of nuclear weapons and nuclear war is really a strikingly subjective process in which no one should have much confidence. Decisions are reached, such as the decision to expand civil defense preparations, on the basis of a hodgepodge of relevant and irrelevant considerations. Different people and groups will oppose or support the decision for their own reasons. Shifting tides of prejudice and habit will play a determining part.

It is certain the debate over civil defense in 1979 will be primarily presented as an issue of whether the U.S. should be strong vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. More intellectual types will be appealed to on the basis of the presumed moderate, prudent, humanitarian character of the Carter civil defense insurance policy. In the existing climate there will be less than adequate attention paid to some possible problems arising out of the new civil defense thrust.

*The Soviet threat.* Regardless of whatever plausible-sounding arguments are made for the Carter civil defense program, an unavoidable consequence of selling the program to the American people and the Congress will be an increase in their fear and suspicion of the Soviet Union. Of course this is the whole point of the exercise for some people. Others, perhaps even President Carter and Defense Secretary Harold Brown, may be less pleased with this side effect. It may complicate, rather than help, the SALT ratification process.

*U.S. military weakness.* Both President Carter and Secretary Brown have on numerous occasions downplayed the effectiveness of Soviet civil defense activities in shielding the Soviet Union from the effects of an American nuclear strike. They have expressed firm confidence in the American deterrent irrespective of Soviet civil defense. However, the effort to promote the new U.S. civil defense program will undoubtedly stimulate widespread concern in the U.S. about the possible potency of Soviet civil defense. It will inspire unnecessary anxieties about U.S. nuclear strength.

*Perceptions.* Increasingly, American military programs are being argued for on the grounds of what other countries might think of the U.S., their "perceptions" of U.S. power or weakness. Officials seem willing to advocate programs that are needed just to improve "perceptions," even if their strictly military justification is less than compelling. The Carter administration's civil defense program has just this character. In April, 1978, the *New York Times* quoted from a secret ten-page memorandum from Secretary Brown to the president:

As you know, the Soviets have shown great interest and considerable activity in this field. While I do not believe that the effort significantly enhances the prospects for Soviet society as a whole following any full-scale nuclear exchange, it has obviously had an effect on international perceptions, particularly in contrast to our small and static civil defense program. *For that reason alone* I believe at least modest efforts on our part could have a high payoff [emphasis added].

An expansion of U.S. civil defense justified primarily on the basis of "international perceptions" (perceptions that Secretary Brown appears to find in error) seems somewhat dubious. It may encourage equally questionable decisionmaking on other defense issues.

*Camel's nose.* More civil defense preparations may be the camel's nose under the tent. Once the American people are convinced of the efficacy of some "limited civil defense measures, they will be appealed to on the same grounds for additional means of protection. Expansion of U.S. air defense capability and stepped-up ABM research and potential deployment of new ABM systems are likely follow-ons. If a little protection is good, why not more?

*Fear of nuclear war.* Another apparently unavoidable—if unintended—consequence of the new stress on civil defense will be that it will serve as a signal of the greater possibility of nuclear war. It is more likely that this increased fear will be mobilized in the direction of military build-up and "tough" foreign policy actions than in the direction of reducing nuclear arsenals.

The heart of the danger in the civil defense issue today was reflected in the words of Clyde Mitchell, director of Oklahoma City's civil defense program: "We don't want to lay down and die in Oklahoma City. Folks around here say, yes, eventually we are going to come to a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. It's sort of inevitable."

## The Background Music

### Paul Ramsey

**T**he trial balloons recently sent up about protecting our population in the event of nuclear war focus on the staged evacuation of cities—not, as in the early Sixties, on bomb shelters. The aim today is more on countering nuclear *threats*, less on protecting people or defending the nation. A capability to maneuver people (like troops) is needed to give the president an option to yielding to nuclear blackmail.

This is what is called crisis management, and it has a "logic" of its own. For example, the U.S. would have to be able to move people out of cities, or protect them there, in vastly greater numbers than Russia needs to do *simply to make things even*. We have far more of our population in far more and far more populous metropolitan areas than has Russia. The president, if he is sensible, is more likely to yield to power-moves under cover of nuclear threats than is Russia. He must blink first. Under such conditions, who *now* has the more credible deterrent?

The main question to be raised about civil defense in a nuclear age never was whether this is feasible or not.

---

PAUL RAMSEY is Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Christian Ethics at Princeton University.

(The plans—long in existence—for the staged evacuation of Oklahoma City are reported to be practical [*New York Times*, December 1, 1978]. Oklahoma City is a good-size Russian city!) Listen to the background music in some of these responses in *Worldview* and the forthcoming national debate over this proposal (if there is one). It will be evident that the morality and feasibility of massive deterrence is the issue. Yesterday, today, and forever in a nuclear age this will be the issue, not one component part of such a strategy. Those who accept the desirability or the irreformability of mutual assured destruction (the MAD policy) will argue that civil defense is infeasible. The background music, however, is that such defense is undesirable because MAD is the only sound or moral strategic policy. By this we get peace, with—it will also be supposed—fewer bucks and no bangs.

I myself doubt there will again be serious discussion of the morality or immorality of the Deterrent State such as there was in the early Sixties. For what can be better than peace, even if the means are immorally aimed at civilian hostages? Peace with butter—and a national health plan.

In the early Sixties I was one of two theologians who dared address the matter of “shelter morality.” L.C. McHugh and I\* probed mainly the micro-problem of what one should do in the event of a breakdown of all government and human beings were returned to a “state of nature” or, at least, to that stage of society in which the paterfamilias or limited local chieftains served also as the highest known political authorities, before the emergence of the differentiation of “government” in larger societies. To such a primitive political situation, I argued, we would be returned by nuclear destruction of modern organized states; and that then the remaining “magistrates” should do what they must to save life when all lives cannot be saved—protecting by whatever means the capacity of a bomb shelter to save life, perhaps against desperate human beings banging at the door, whom to admit would mean all would be lost. The Princeton faculty planned, in those days, to designate the underground levels of Firestone Library as a place of refuge for ourselves and the students, for whom we had first responsibility, then as a community shelter *to the extent* the facilities allowed. This was proper planning, but only if the larger context was proper.

Father McHugh may have been told to write no more; and it would have saved personal energy if I also had been so told—since few then or now in the church or in American political society seem able to be convinced that the chief thing wrong with fallout shelters or city evacuations is not their infeasibility but, rather, their participation in the gross immorality of our MAD deterrence policy. The articulate élites in our nation and in the churches seem to believe that they can accept the Deterrent State while still braying against civil defense

and even against vats of Pentagon poison. Thus the neutron bomb was opposed, even though it is a more discriminate weapon. It kills *people* was the vocal reason. The real reason was: We ought to do nothing to weaken or alter our single-minded intention to destroy entire populations on the condition that we are attacked—to *prevent* that attack, of course!

Looking back, I should have introduced this further micro-point. I should have made the case for a just revolution against the Deterrent State that *means* to make no defense of its people. In a thrice the theory of justifiable *revolution* can be directed against a government such as ours that means to maneuver its citizens (whether to protect them or not) as if we all are soldiers, and that also treats the entire citizenry of an adversary as if they were combatants, pawns in the power struggle between nations.

***“How explain [the churches’] acceptance of the systematic political intention of the U.S. to do evil that good may come?”***

I should have argued that every head of household, or local councilman, is *in principle* already a chief magistrate who may be called upon to overthrow the magistrates in power who have abandoned the intention to wage only just war. That, in short, MAD has placed us *before* such deterrence fails in a situation like the one *when* deterrence fails. I should have argued with John Calvin that “if there be, in the present day, any magistrates appointed for the protection of the people and the moderation of the power of kings . . . I am so far from prohibiting them in the discharge of their duty, to oppose the violence and cruelty of kings, that I affirm that if they connive in their oppression of their people, such forbearance involves the most nefarious perfidy, because they fraudulently betray the [lives and] liberty of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by the ordinance of God.” Such connivance now takes the stark form of taking hostages and giving the people of one’s own nation over to be hostages to deter a nuclear enemy. Any “forbearance” to raise democratic opposition to massive deterrence or, that failing, to bring about radical reform in military policy, to raise a revolution against such government, is indeed a nefarious perfidy.

The greatest betrayal, however, has been that of the churches. How explain our acceptance of the systematic political intention of the U.S. to do evil that good may come? Especially, how can this be excused on the part of spokesmen of churches whose stance is cooperation with political institutions when just and necessary; disagreement, opposition, and efforts to reform when they are not? How excuse the exertions of political participatory religious influence that seizes so many occasions to fasten the hold of an unaltered MAD policy upon us, instead of undertaking the difficult intellectual and

\*L.C. McHugh, S.J., “Ethics at the Shelter Doorway,” *America* (September 30, 1961); Paul Ramsey, “Shelter Morality,” *Presbyterian Life* (November 15, 1961); with correspondence, January 1, 1962. Father McHugh concentrated more exclusively on the micro-problem than I—if anyone wants to know.

practical task of finding and supporting those military policies and weapons decisions that can transform this system?\*

A nonpacifist Christian should experience an enduring moral sorrow over the exclusive attention of the church to other concerns in recent years, and over its misattention to this one. Even Christians who stand within the tradition of involvement in the constraining realities of politics know, or should know, that the state can become a beast or a drunken "harlot sitting on the seven hills."

This is a moment of mortal peril for our nation, all the more because it is unrecognized. By mortal peril I do not so much mean survival as our place in the future moral and political history of mankind. Symbolically, but only symbolically, the critical moment was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, Riverside Church address linking the plight of the poor and the blacks to the Vietnam war (April 4, 1967). Then liberals supposed there would be a "peace dividend" resulting from extrication from that war. King only tapped beliefs already deeply imbedded in the mentality of the articulate liberal élite, especially in the churches.

There was no such "peace dividend" in sight of any realistic analysis at that time. It is not surprising, then,

---

\*It is rather late, if not too late, to cite in support of options to our confirmed MAD policy the following experts who are no way contaminated by theological political reasoning: Arthur Lee Burns (*Adelphi Paper*, No. 69, "Ethics and Deterrence: A Nuclear Balance Without Hostage Cities?" [London: Institute for Strategic Studies, July, 1970]); Donald G. Brennan of the Hudson Institute, who first coined the MAD acronym (*New York Times*, Op. Ed. page [May 24 and 25, 1971]); and Bruce M. Russett ("Short of Nuclear Madness," *Worldview* [April, 1972]). In this and other articles Russett advocated a *countercombatant* deterrent. The Russians are adequately deterred by a credible threat that the U.S. can and will wipe out their army on the Chinese border; there is no need to aim at their civilian population. For the record I may add that in earlier writings on the morality of warfare and of deterrence my expression "counterforce" took its meaning from its opposite, "counterpeople." I never meant to say the U.S. should develop the overwhelming power to destroy Russia's missile forces with impunity. Russett's expression "countercombatant" exactly expresses my meaning—including their military forces, of course.

that those already addicted to such expectations have since continued to befuddle U.S. foreign policy by the same hopes. This leads such people to place greater and greater reliance on "minimum" deterrence, meantime blinding themselves to sound discussion of any such policy by rhetorical persuasions that we already had too much.

So I seriously suggest that any sensible person—for his own serenity, if for no other reason, whether possessed of the apostle John's ultimate faith or not—refuse to discuss or get agitated about any single item or all the separate items together that are on our present military agenda *unless* he or she has some expectation of opening again the discussion of the basic immorality and the final irrationality of the present shape of mutual deterrence. This would be a sound political resolution whether the specific issue is bomb shelters or staged city evacuation or the neutron bomb or the Trident submarine or SALT II, or whether we already have overkilled and can safely cut the defense budget, or our commitment to NATO to increase the budget by 3 per cent, beyond inflation, or whether we can abandon altogether our continent-based missiles and depend on the other two parts of the tripod (submarine and air-based city-destroying missiles), or should learn to move the Minuteman missiles around or instead increase their throw-weight or multiple accuracy.

These are only some of the options in contention. Discussion of them is "sound and fury signifying nothing," unless and until we relate them each and every one to the radical transformation of mutual massive nuclear deterrence. As long as any of these options is only a subordinate aspect of MAD, it too is equally M-A-D, however feasible or infeasible when considered alone. If a sound discussion of military strategy could be launched, it would not have as a basic premise "more bang for the buck." But neither can the premise be—to which the religious are inclined—the notions that we can have enough immorally intended but planned-not-to-be-used bangs with fewer bucks, or that what was once called "minimum deterrence" is a good idea because it promises that we can turn our attention to the priority of domestic claims on the Federal budget, or that distributing more butter could possibly justify the peacekeeping means our nation now relies on.