Nuclear vigil must be maintained

Column by Matthew Hersch

"When you got nothing, you get nothing to lose."

Bob Dylan

Rushing living groups last week had me thinking seriously about nuclear weapons. According to some analysts, by the time I am a junior, Iraq may possess an offensive nuclear capability, and may very well flex its military muscle in an attack on another neighbor state. While picking on the Iraqis for their invasion of Kuwait seems to be in vogue right now, the crisis in the Middle East raises complex, less well-defined questions on the entire structure of the world's nuclear deterrence.

In the good old days of mass hysteria and East-West confrontation, most politicians had a good idea where any large-scale war between the United States and the Soviet Union, the two major nuclear powers, would end up. Massive retaliation, one of the earliest US nuclear strategies, and Mutual Assured Destruction, one of the most recent, both implied that an aggressive act on the part of either superpower would provoke the massive counter response, until the original aggressor was destroyed. For 40 years this threat was real enough to prevent the US-Soviet engagement in Central Europe which world leaders of the 1950's had assumed would occur in the near future. Conflicts between smaller nations allied with the superpowers seemed guaranteed to end in superpower war, and this deterrent kept many smaller skirmishes from exploding into holocaust.

But just as old battles seem to be crumbling with the Berlin Wall, the security of the Cold War melted in the summer heat. World nuclear proliferation now poses an even greater threat to superpower war and to non-nuclear nations alike. The vulnerability to direct attack of non-nuclear nations which, unlike the United States or Soviet Union, would probably use them, is just one of the many factors which now will try to stretch outward and develop offensive nuclear capabilities quietly enough to avoid angering a superpower and provoking retaliation. Such nations, once possessing a critical mass of weapons, would be in a position to wage a war that could not be contained by anything less than all-out nuclear war.

If the US is to continue to develop nuclear weapons, it will do so for strategic defense, and to provide a "deterrent" to the Soviet military command against the possibility of aggression by any nation, nuclear or non-nuclear. Iraq is among many nations which, unlike the United States or Israel, in which nuclear war now seems possible to end in a superpower war, will be able to face it with a weapon of nuclear capability.

As the US pursues a 'strategic defense initiative', the development of technologies and the testing of new strategic weapons will be increased to the point where there are increasing fears of nuclear proliferation.

In the future, most nations will have the ability to build nuclear weapons. Some nations may have nuclear capability if they can keep it secret. Others may be forced to admit their claims.

As nuclear proliferation continues, we must continue to think about the possibility of a war that would be too terrifying to ever occur.

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