

## A New Problem for Modern Weapons

One of the defining characteristics of the modern age is the rapid advancement of our technological abilities. Of interest is the rise and development of nuclear technology. By itself, nuclear technology holds much promise as a way to generate energy for the growing demands of the modern world. However, when nuclear technology is combined with modern military technology (particularly the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles) the outcome is a clear case of technology having a bad effect on humankind's well being.

For the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ethicists and policy makers had to struggle with the rise of nuclear weapons and the tensions between superpowers. A fragile and ethically uncomfortable consensus gradually formed during the Cold War and the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction was adopted by policy makers and endorsed by ethicists as the best one out of many bad options. Fortunately, MAD has kept the peace for now and the tensions of the Cold War have been reduced. However, technology has still progressed and presents us with new ethical problems for these weapons.

Keir Lieber, a political scientist at Notre Dame, and Daryl Press, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, have recently argued that the "age of MAD is nearing an end."<sup>1</sup> They claim that because of failures in the Russian military and success in United States military technology the United States currently on the brink of achieving nuclear supremacy. This means, that among other things, the United States could wage a nuclear war without the fear of massive retaliation. (To be clear, neither Lieber nor Press advocate for this action. Rather, their paper merely lays out an argument that MAD is finished and we are entering new age.)

One of the ethical questions this new environment confronts us with is: Is it always permissible for nations to seek the best arsenal and technology to protect itself (provided, of course, that pursuit of these goods doesn't entail that the nation has to take other actions that are morally reprehensible)? This questions is pressing because the United States is now in a position to pursue policies that will make it more secure and allow it to "transcend" MAD. In this paper I will attempt to address this question. First, I will briefly lay out Lieber and Press' case. Next, I will explore more in depth the above question and show why I think that the fall of MAD will force us to answer this question. Finally, I will propose that we should not think that nations have a right to maximize their security.

In the process of addressing the problem I will draw on the work of Pope Benedict XVI and his thoughts on freedom. I intend to argue that the desire to maximize protection is an instance of the modern pathology to be like God and be without constraints. It is no surprise that nations, like people, desire this freedom but I will argue that it is not a freedom befitting of people or nations that seek to do more than maximize their power.

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<sup>1</sup> See "The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006.