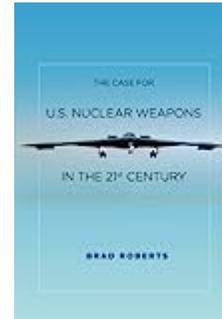




**Brad Roberts.** *The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. 352 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-9713-9.



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Brad Roberts's 2015 *The Case for US Nuclear Weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is as compelling as it is timely. Roberts produces a work that effectively bridges the gap between academia and policymakers by carefully examining US nuclear posture and policy from the end of the Cold War to present, highlighting continuity and change between administrations and offering future policy recommendations based on the patterns illuminated. He dedicates the book to Therese Delpech, noting that it is "guided by her values." Those values include the clarity of her policy vision, willingness to challenge weak leadership, and conviction that a deciding factor in the battle against savagery will still be the strength of democracies in the twenty-first century, just as it was in the twentieth.

The book begins with a few fundamental questions: Are nuclear weapons merely relics of the Cold War or still viable to US national security strategy? If they are still viable, then what is their role as a deterrent post-Cold War? Is it plausible that nuclear weapons can be reduced to zero in the foreseeable future? Roberts seeks to answer these questions through tracing US nuclear policy and posture from the end of the Cold War through the Obama administration and then highlighting current problems facing US national security. These concerns include new *regional* challengers and corresponding deter-

rence strategies; a deteriorating relationship with Russia and a precarious one with China; and charting deterrence and strategic stability approaches with allies, challengers, and nuclear powers in both Europe and North-east Asia.

While Roberts is able to tackle much in this work, there are two main glaring issues. The first is conceptual in nature and the second more material. Roberts begins his work by noting that much of the problem with nuclear parlance, both in the academic and policy realms, stems from a continued focus on the Cold War: on deterrence strategies, policy, and posture, and a debate over whether nuclear weapons have become a relic. In order to move the discussion forward, he attempts to fill a key gap in the current debate by shifting the discussion of nuclear weapons away from the focus of preventing major-power wars to the current climate of regional challengers. However, I often felt like the Cold War framework was central to this piece. In outlining the new issues that face US national security, Roberts coins a "Red Theory" and a "Blue Theory" for theorizing possible strategic nuclear interactions, where the aggressors, namely Russia, China, and North Korea, are part of the Red camp and the United States and Western allies fall under the Blue camp. Though this is merely a conceptual

fault, it should be addressed if the goal is really to move past a Cold War framework for thinking about nuclear policy and posture.

A second, and perhaps more important, issue with this piece is a narrow focus on proliferation cases. While I realize that Roberts organized this work around threats facing the United States, more consideration should have been given to other cases of proliferation. Roberts briefly mentions Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and ISIS in chapter 2, but concludes that these cases do not offer much explanatory power for understanding how leaders may use nuclear weapons. Spending much of the book discussing the threat of North Korea, Roberts completely leaves out any concrete discussion of states that have reversed their nuclear weapons programs. There are far more states that have reversed their weapons programs than have succeeded in becoming a nuclear weapons state, and to

leave out discussion of these states and what the phenomenon of nuclear reversal means to nonproliferation studies is a real concern, especially given that one of the goals of this book is to explore whether reducing nuclear weapons to zero is plausible.

In many ways, this book lives up to its dedication: as an answer to clear policy recommendation, frank discussion about American leadership, and defining the role for nuclear weapons in the international order. Everyone who has an interest in nuclear (non)proliferation, in US national security, and in understanding the current international order should read this book. It is equally accessible to the academy, the policy realm, and the layperson and is a true triumph in outlining the case for nuclear weapons as an important and irreplaceable contribution to US national security.

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