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War in Ukraine: the Bankruptcy of Nuclear Deterrence

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The war which Vladimir Putin declared on 24 February 2022 against Ukraine, and de facto against Europe, will surprise only people who have veiled their faces and blocked their ears for decades... and who continue to do so.



Other time, other spirit. On 8 December 1987, Gorbachev and Reagan signed the Washington Treaty which eliminated the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) from Europe, preparing the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the End of the Cold War.

If France's leaders had heard the calls which we haven't stopped sending, which I have been sending for 36 years - ever since Mikhail Gorbachev's call in January 1986 to **"End all nuclear weapons by the year 2000!" (1)** - the world would probably be already free from nuclear arms, or close to that point, and we would not have a military invasion today at the gates of Europe.

For despite what is asserted by the adepts of "nuclear deterrence", nuclear weapons do not prevent war, indeed they favour it. Since 1945 they have not prevented all sorts of wars from causing more victims in total than the First World War. Far from it, they have nearly provoked a 3rd World War, nuclear in nature, several times (in 1953, 1956, 1962, 1983, 2000...). The current crisis confronts us once again with this possibility.

Nuclear arms did not deter Vladimir Putin from starting a war. On the contrary, they give him a sense of invincibility and impunity which leads him to flout International Law and, shamelessly, to attack Ukraine, a state whose frontiers Russia had actually guaranteed in exchange for not keeping the nuclear weapons it had inherited from the USSR ([Mémorandum de Budapest](#)). With his hypersonic missiles, Putin thinks he can outclass all the other nuclear powers and avoid their potential reprisals. Not only is he not intimidated by NATO's (or France's) nukes, he doesn't hesitate to blandish the nuclear threat against those who might be tempted to *"stand in Russia's path"*.

These weapons, already powerless against terrorists, as the US people learnt to their sorrow on 11 September 2001, are also powerless to deter a state actor resembling Putin. One man, of whatever nation, with or without a dictator's soul, becomes capable of anything, anything at all, when he has in his hands the means of liquidating millions of human beings with impunity. Even if he's a good Christian, like Harry Truman, who thanked God for giving him the bomb before Hitler and who, promptly, used it against Japan at a time when [he knew that Emperor Hirohito wanted to surrender](#).

That is why we must absolutely rid the planet of all nuclear and radioactive weapons, arms for crimes against humanity. They have only one privilege: the ability to provoke Doomsday at any moment. But M. Le Drian, indifferent

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to this logical conclusion, has spoken on France-Inter reminding Putin that "France too is a nuclear power". In other words he is warning him that if he (Putin) acted on his threats by incinerating France, then we would take revenge by massacring his own population. It is far from certain that a dictator like him, not very concerned about the well-being of his people, would recoil in the face of such a threat. But it is certain that the liquidation of several million Russians courtesy of our French President would not resuscitate the millions of our citizens who had already been wiped out. It would only prompt the Russian leader complete the massacre.

That is the carefully guarded secret of nuclear deterrence: against an enemy who won't be intimidated, it is useless. It does not enable us to avoid a so-called "conventional war" like the one in Ukraine at present. As for our "vital interests", it defends them only by promising a collective suicide: by ensuring that mutual destruction occurs... with aggravations! Russians will be killed in our name, posthumously, and a few more French people will be killed. Oh joy!

Have no doubt: this deterrence functions like a "life-insurance": we benefit only once we are dead. But do the people of France want to keep subscribing to it? 85% of them, less stupid than their leaders, would answer No ([IFOP-ACDN poll, May 2018](#)).

That is provided the question is put to them - and this year all the presidential candidates, enlightened individuals, are refusing to ask it. Such bankruptcy is not something to declare - too many dark interests are in play, in this morbid world which has as its cornerstone the atom bomb, the threat of large-scale death... war and the commerce of war, norms apparently unchangeable.

"Ah, damn fools!" said Daladier in 1983 on his return from Munich. Europe this time, has recalled the lesson. A vigorous reaction is being made, true, but it is arriving rather late and it could even provoke Doomsday. Will Europe also recall the lesson of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Unlikely!

"End all nuclear weapons by the year 2030!" would be the only saving legacy of Gorbachev, who managed to end the Cold War without a single shot being fired. Now may the heroic resistance of the Ukrainians teach us this other lesson: Let's finally get rid of nuclear weapons, let's deprive tyrants of them!

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Candidate to the French presidential elections of 2002 and 2022. Pour une France démocratique et conviviale dans un monde en paix, décarboné, dénucléarisé, démilitarisé (www.tousalelysee.net)

(1) Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (Doubleday, London, 1996), pp. 412, 416-420

Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons* (Metropolitan Books, New York, 1998), pp. 161-162

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Robert Green, *Security without Nuclear Deterrence* (Astron Media and the Disarmament & Security Centre, 2010), pp. 98-99.