Nuclear Know-Nothings on Campaign Trail

By John LaForge
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Last year Donald Trump said on *Meet the Press* that he'd "absolutely" use nuclear weapons against the Islamic State, reports investigative journalist Richard Hobuss. "It starts with the deployment of four or five of our Ohio-class [Trident] nuclear submarines to the Persian Gulf. … I'm talking about a surgical strike on these ISIS stronghold cities using Trident missiles," Trump reportedly said.

Senator Barry Goldwater was pilloried for such talk in 1964 (see accompanying story) and went on to lose the presidential election.

But this was Trump-the-blowhard uncorked. Trident missiles can fly 4,570 miles, so they don't have to sail the narrow and deadly Straits of Hormuz into the Gulf to smash cities in the Middle East. They can do that from the Atlantic. Trump, like all wannabe nuclear gunslingers, should have a better grasp of thermonuclear war power. Then he could properly boast that the US—to paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King—is the greatest purveyor of terrorism in the world today.

Some military officers understand this. According to CNN military analyst Peter Mansoor (US Army, Ret.) using nuclear warheads against ISIS-held areas like the city of Al-Raqqah would cause an "astronomically high" number of civilian deaths, Hobuss reported. "Al-Raqqah alone has a population of over 200,000 people, the vast majority of whom are not affiliated in any way with the Islamic State," Mansoor said. "A strike of this magnitude would … result in the loss of millions of innocent lives…."

General George Lee Butler, former head of the Strategic Command, said 20 years ago, "We have yet to fully grasp the monstrous effects of these weapons, that the consequence of their use defy reason, transcending time and space, poisoning the earth and deforming its inhabitants."

US warhead metrics bear this out. The smallest nuclear weapon in the arsenal—B61 gravity bombs deployed in the United States, Europe and Turkey—are up to 33 times the power of the city-busting bomb that killed 140,000 people in Hiroshima. The B61s with their 100-500 kiloton "variable yield" warheads can each potentially destroy up to 4.6 million people. The devices Mr. Trump spoke of, 475-kiloton warheads on the Trident submarines, could each turn 4.4 million people into powder and ash. Think of the populations of Boston, or Phoenix or San Francisco—gone.

Looking at geographic consequences, the crude 15-kiloton bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima pulverized seven square miles. All else being equal, any one of the "forward-deployed" B61 or Trident warheads could burn down roughly 233 square miles. Imagine cities the size of Chicago, or Austin, or Lexington—rubbished.

Nuclear weapons effects

The radioactive mass destruction that Donald Trump is promising was famously outlined by Helen Caldicott in her book *Nuclear Madness* (Revised, W.W. Norton, 1994). "Population centers would be smashed flat. Each nuclear weapon's shockwave would come with a searing fireball with a surface temperature greater than the sun's that would set firestorms raging over thousands of acres. The fires would scorch the earth, consuming most plant and wildlife."

A 1977 book by the Departments of Defense and Energy titled *The Effects of Nuclear Weapons,* put it this way: "The frequency of burn injuries due to a nuclear explosion is exceptionally high. Most of these are flash burns caused by direct exposure to the pulse of thermal radiation, although individuals trapped by spreading fires may be subjected to flame burns."

If target populations had time to find shelter, Caldicott noted, "People caught in shelters near the center of the nuclear blasts would die immediately of concussive effects or asphyxiation brought on as a result of oxygen depletion during the firestorms. Exposed to immense amounts of high-energy gamma radiation, anyone who survived near the epicenter would likely die within two weeks, of acute radiation sickness."

The DoD/DoE study explained: "In addition, persons in buildings or tunnels close to ground zero may be burned by hot gases and dust entering the structure, even though they are shielded adequately from direct or scattered thermal radiation. Finally, there are…harmful effects of the nuclear radiations on the body. These represent a source of casualties entirely new to warfare." [Well not entirely. By 1977, the study's writers certainly knew of the radiation effects that were endured by survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.]

"Those who survived, in shelters or in remote rural areas," Caldicott warned, "would reenter a totally devastated world, lacking the life-support systems upon which human beings depend. Food, air, and water would be poisonously radioactive." Wind-blown fallout would radioactively contaminate territories and populations not party to the conflict, which—as if mass destruction with nuclear firestorms weren't criminal enough—would constitute further violations of the Hague and Geneva Conventions, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Beyond the radioactive fallout, enraged resentment directed at the United States would grow worse and spread further than today and make retaliation and reprisals like Paris, Russia's Metrojet flight 9268—and the 16 terrorist incidents in Turkey just this year—more likely than ever.

Chicken hawks' warheads at the ready

Although a draft-dodging Chicken Hawk like Trump may not know it, between 50 and 90 US B61 nuclear bombs are now deployed at Turkey's Incirlik Air Force Base, and are ready for loading onto US jet fighter bombers currently blowing up villages in Syria and Iraq.

Turkey has reluctantly joined this incoherent bombing campaign, and it could justly be afraid of terroristic retaliation for it, especially now that nuclear war hype is being spread by US presidential hopefuls. Indeed, in view of the 2003 US war on Iraq, ISIS could use Vice-President Dick Cheney's own words to justify pre-emptive attacks against US nuclear weapons bunkers in Turkey and say the attack was "Made in America."

Trump and his supporters would benefit from reading genuine military hawks like General Butler. Writing for the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Gen. Butler condemned the mere thought of initiating nuclear war, saying, "First-use policies are in direct contradiction to our self-interest." The same year Paul Nitze, a former hardline presidential advisor in the Reagan administration, wrote in the *New York Times*, "I can think of no circumstances under which it would be wise for the United States to use nuclear weapons."

The irrationality of using nuclear weapons could hardly be more obvious.

Terrible burns were inflicted by the atomic bombs and were endured for years afterward. One victim wrote, "Once home, I collapsed in a coma and remained unconscious for three weeks. Later, I was treated by a doctor ... who came to our house morning and night to see me. Ordinarily, severe burns would not be treated by a [specialist], but with nearly all the doctors and nurses in the city either dead or incapacitated, I was extremely fortunate to receive treatment from any sort of doctor at all." —Photo: www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/people/radiation

Clinton Ad Implies a President Trump Would Increase Risk of Nuclear War

A pro-Hillary Clinton group is releasing a new television ad—complete with images of a mushroom [cloud]—that strongly implies Donald Trump could trigger a nuclear war if elected president.

"I'm really good at war. I love war, in a certain way," Mr. Trump says over old footage of soldiers in the 30-second ad released on [Sept. 6] by the group, Priorities USA Action.

"Including with nukes, yes—including with nukes," he says as an image of a mushroom cloud is seen in the background, footage that hearkens back to Lyndon Johnson's famous 1964 "Daisy" ad in his race against Barry Goldwater.

"I know more about ISIS than the generals do, believe me," Mr. Trump says. The ad concludes with Mr. Trump saying he wants to be "unpredictable" and says Mr. Trump is "unfit to be president."

The ad is part of an approximately $5 million buy that is to start airing [Sept. 9] in a handful of key battleground states. **—David Sherfinski, *Washington Times*, Sept. 6, 2016**

Wild Turkey with H-Bomb: Failed Coup Raise Calls for Denuclearization

By John LaForge
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An explosive cocktail of military instability mixed with 11-foot long US nuclear bombs raises the specter of accidental or suicidal detonation in or near Turkey. This risk was brought into extreme relief by the attempted military coup there in mid-July.

In June, I warned in *CounterPunch* magazine and elsewhere that the Pentagon's 50 to 90 B61 thermonuclear gravity bombs deployed at Incirlik Air Force Base in Turkey are too dangerous to keep so close to a war zone—Incirlik AFB is 100 miles from Islamic State territory—especially with racists Donald Trump pursuing the White House. Journalists with the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Japan Times*, *Foreign Policy*, and the *San Antonio Express News* don't read my columns, but suddenly the Pentagon's nuclear bombs in Turkey are a hot topic.

Tobin Harshaw reported for Bloomberg July 25—although he mischaracterized the bombs—"Until recently, the question of whether the United States should continue to station nuclear missiles [sic] in Turkey was of interest only to a passel of national-security geeks and nonproliferation advocates. One failed coup later, the discussion has spread to CNN, *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and elsewhere."

Harshaw went on to validate an analysis by Jeffrey Lewis of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, who argues that in the wake of the failed coup, "Turkey is not a sensible base for nuclear deterrence." But in the irrational, self-contradictory realm of nuclear war planning, the B61s are being stored at Incirlik because military hawks insist on "maintaining the capability to attack Iran" with H-bombs, Harshaw reported. Never mind that Russia and Pakistan would doubtless retaliate with their nuclear warheads if the US used its own against Iran.

The reasons our military's so-called "forward deployment" of the B61s amounts to nuclear madness were only highlighted by the bloody, hapless coup inside Turkey July 15. The B61s' uselessness and vulnerability—anti-war protesters have regularly snuck into NATO bases where B61s are stored—have been broadcast by major news outlets from New York to Tokyo:

1) *The Los Angeles Times* reported July 23: "The base was an operational center of the attempted coup" which, US military experts said, demonstrated "a worrying level of instability in Turkey's military command close to the B61s." Wikipedia lists 20 terrorist strikes inside Turkey since 9/11.

2) The B61s stored at Incirlik are designed for the McDonnell Douglas Corporation's long-range, high speed F-15E jet fighter and for Lockheed Martin's F-16 jet fighter, according to the *Washington Post*. But none of these planes are based at Incirlik or in the Turkish Air Force. As the *LA Times* reported, "The US does not have aircraft at Incirlik qualified to deliver the weapons." ("In order for the weapons to actually be used, the US would have to fly a squadron of aircraft into Incirlik to load the bombs, all of which would be observed by Russia and possibly make the base a target for a first strike," the *Times* reported.)

3) The B61s are designed to prevent unauthorized use as they have safeguards known as "use controls" and "permissive action links." But Robert Peurifoy, formerly of the Sandia National Laboratory where he, according to the *LA Times*, "designed the first use controls on weapons based in Europe," said that the "use controls may only impede and delay a terrorist. … Either you keep custody or you should expect a mushroom cloud."

4) General Eugene Habiger (USAF Ret.), a former commander of all Air Force and Navy strategic nuclear weapons (he led the Strategic Command from 1996 to 1998), told the *San Antonio Express News* July 22 "the bombs no longer have any military usefulness." And General Habiger warned, "It's a very, very dangerous weapon in terms of military consequences, political consequences, and I think what happened in Turkey highlights the potential unintended consequences of having nuclear weapons forward deployed if there is no military requirement."

5) The B61s will almost certainly never be used, according to Aaron Stein, a Turkey analyst at the Atlantic Council, who spoke to the *LA Times*. This common knowledge moved General Habiger to ask, "Why does NATO need nuclear weapons?"

Why indeed. As Jeffrey Lewis noted June 18, "after the events of the past weekend, leaving them in place seems positively terrifying." Wild Turkey becomes the latest and best reason ever to permanently remove US nuclear weapons from Turkey.

How powerful is the B61 gravity bomb?

* Bloomberg News says the B61 is a "variable-yield" device, meaning the size of the explosion can be between .3 kilotons [300 tons] and 340 kilotons of TNT equivalent.

* The *Los Angeles Times* reports that it can be programed to have between 300 tons of TNT explosive force [.3 kilotons], and 170,000 tons [170 kilotons].

* Nuclear weapons analyst John Pike, with www.globalsecurity.org, says "yields range from 'a few hundred tons to 160 kilotons.'"

* *The Nuclear Weapons Datebook*, Vol. 1 (Ballinger, 1988) says the yield is from 100 to 500 kilotons.

To compare: the US Army Air Corp's Hiroshima bomb, which incinerated 7 square miles and killed 140,000 people, was 15 kilotons.