

# PEACE DOSSIER 4

## NUCLEAR WAR: the threat to Australia

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In the debate about nuclear weapons Australians have until recently tended to accept the comfortable notion that any nuclear war will be fought far from our shores. This assumption was challenged in 1981 by an all-party committee of the Federal Parliament which for the first time admitted the likelihood that the American communications and intelligence bases at Pine Gap, Nurrungar and North West Cape would be hit by nuclear weapons in the event of a war between the superpowers. Unfortunately, even this was grossly underestimate the danger posed by our involvement in the competition between the nuclear powers. As we shall see below, we may not escape so lightly.

#### The New Orthodoxy

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Australian Parliament in 1981 produced a report entitled, "Threats to Australia's Security . . . Their Nature and Probability". Early in that report (p.1) the Committee states, "Except insofar as Australia hosts facilities associated with the United States nuclear war deterrent, any hostile attention to Australia early in a nuclear war would be unlikely or incidental."

The Committee quotes Mr. R. H. Mathams, then Director of Scientific and Technical Intelligence, Joint Intelligence Organization, who in March 1978 said: "Although the likelihood of strategic nuclear attack against Australia is not great it is none-the-less finite . . . The USSR . . . now has sufficient warheads to adequately target the US and retain substantial reserves for use against secondary targets . . . In descending order of probability, Australia might receive strategic nuclear attacks against: US facilities in Australia; Australian defence establishments; industrial complexes and urban centres . . . The Committee then adds that, "In the very unlikely event of a nuclear attack on Australia, about half a dozen nuclear weapons could be sufficient to disable this nation, because of the concentration of population and industry in a few cities." (p. 14)

Further in the Committee's report it says, "An argument can be put that in a nuclear war the Soviet Union may have a motive to destroy Australia's capacity to support or succour the United States (after the latter has been severely damaged in such a war), particularly as the Soviet Union is likely to need only an insignificant part of its nuclear arsenal to incapacitate a few Australian cities. This chapter has already cast some doubts on such a notion . . ." (p. 15)

The purpose of this Dossier is to ask whether the risks to Australia posed by the American bases and the ANZUS Alliance have been seriously underestimated.

Later, in answer to a question as to whether in a general war the presence of the US facilities would attract hostile attention to other more highly populated centres in Australia, the Committee answers, ". . . probably no. If for no other reason this unlikelihood can be attributed to the need of the Soviet Union (which like the United States has less nuclear warheads than potential 'counterforce' targets)" to concentrate on targets which are of a higher priority than Australian cities." (p. 28)

Regarding a further question as to whether Australia would be a nuclear target if the US facilities

were not in Australia (whether or not Australia was a member of the Western alliance) the Committee answers that, "it will be very unlikely . . . it is the presence of the joint facilities . . . that provides the risk of nuclear attack. This raises the question of whether or not the presence of the facilities is justified. The justification is derived from the limited dangers of their presence and their contribution to the central balance and to arms control." (p. 28)

Finally, in its conclusions the Committee states, "The joint Australian-United States facilities at Pine Gap, Nurrungar and North West Cape are likely to be on the Soviet nuclear target list. . . The presence of the installations can be justified in terms of their contribution to the central balance between the superpowers, and because it can be seen to confer additional advantages on Australia in its alliance with the United States. Nevertheless, it could be argued that it is the presence of the installations, not the existence of the alliance, which may make Australia a nuclear target. However, it can also be argued that the risks associated with nuclear attack on Australia are outweighed by the advantages Australia derives from its alliance with the United States. The ANZUS Alliance is likely to act as a deterrent against those potentially hostile actions against Australia that would be beyond Australia's own capabilities." (p. 53)

The purpose of this Dossier is to ask, especially in the light of a scenario for a major nuclear war recently published by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, whether the risks to Australia posed by the American bases and the ANZUS Alliance have been seriously underestimated by the Joint Committee.

#### The Swedish Scenario

The "Swedish Scenario", as I shall call it, is a set of assumptions about a nuclear war, which were drawn up by a panel of experts (see Box 1) appointed to advise the editors of *AMBIO*, the environmental journal of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. The purpose of the scenario was to provide the basis for a series of articles on the human and environmental consequences of a plausible major nuclear war. It was not intended to describe the most probable nuclear war, nor to serve as the basis for a discussion of defence planning. Indeed, the authors expressly state that, "In order to generate the likely environmental effects of a nuclear war, this scenario is more catastrophic than that envisioned by many defence planners." (*AMBIO*, p. 94)

#### THE AMBIO ADVISORY GROUP

The *AMBIO* advisory group which drew up the nuclear war scenario included:

Dr. Frank Barnaby, Professor of Peace Studies at the Free University of Amsterdam, and former director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Dr. Joseph Rotblat, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of London and a founder of the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs.

Henning Rodhe, Professor of Chemical Meteorology at the Arrhenius Laboratory, University of Stockholm.

Dr. Lars Kristoferson, Scientific Program Officer of the Beijer International Institute for Energy and Human Ecology, Stockholm.

Jan Prawitz, special assistant for disarmament to Sweden's Minister of Defense.

Jeanne Peterson, Editor of *AMBIO*.

Despite these caveats, the Swedish scenario is not a worst case scenario, but rather, was deliberately chosen as a plausible intermediate case between "limited" nuclear war and the ultimate use of all available weapons. The scenario thus assumes that less than half of the total explosive power in the Soviet and American nuclear arsenals will be used. The authors comment, "Many people believe that any use of nuclear weapons will escalate into a war in which all or most of the weapons in the nuclear arsenals are used, which is why there are scenarios much more catastrophic than this one in the literature." (p. 94)

The scenario assumes that a global nuclear war breaks out during 1985. By then, the panel estimates that the USA will have about 13,000 strategic nuclear warheads or bombs with a total explosive power of some 3,500 megatons, and the Soviet Union about 11,300 strategic nuclear warheads, having a total explosive power of 4,100 to 8,600 megatons depending on the power of the new Soviet ICBM warheads. Together the USA and the Soviet Union will also have an additional 35,000 tactical nuclear warheads containing roughly 4,400 megatons.\*

According to the panel, "The problem with any scenario of a nuclear war is to choose a set of targets for fifty to sixty thousand nuclear warheads. There is so much overkill in the arsenals that the exercise becomes overwhelming. . . . In our 'limited' scenario we have only targeted 14,737 warheads, comprising less than half the megatonnage in the 1985 arsenals, or about 5,750 megatons." (p. 94)

In their scenario the panel regards North America, Europe and the Soviet Union as the main strategic areas, "although a number of other countries are considered important for strategic and political purposes." Specifically, in allocating bombs, the panel states that:

"Cities in the USA, Canada, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the USSR, Japan, North and South Korea, Vietnam, Australia, South Africa and Cuba are targeted with the following megatonnages (ground bursts):

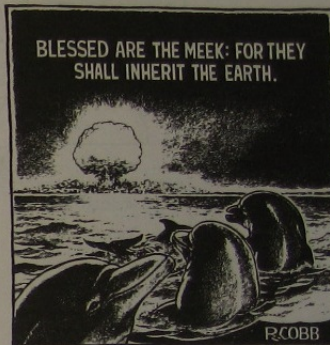
- Cities with 100,000 - 1 million people: 1 megaton (three 300-kiloton warheads, one 100-kiloton warhead).
- Cities with 1 million - 3 million people: 3 megatons (three one-megaton warheads).
- Cities with 3 million or more people: 10 megatons (ten 500-kiloton, five one-megaton warheads." (p. 95)

Similar allocations are made for cities in China, India, Pakistan, and the remaining areas of South-East Asia except that they start with cities of 500,000 people or more. Important industries, energy supplies and mineral resources, other than those in the cities, are also targeted in the countries involved, all with air bursts. Remaining military targets, airfields and ports are also hit (with ground bursts).

Of the total of 5,742 megatons used, the Southern Hemisphere receives only 173 megatons. Nevertheless, it is instructive to look at what this scenario means for Australia.

A total of 33 megatons is destined for Australian targets, of which 21 megatons falls on our major cities. Every State capital is hit, along with the major provincial cities of Geelong, Newcastle and Wollongong. All receive 1 megaton each except Melbourne with 3 megatons and Sydney with 10 megatons (because it is just over 3 million people). Canberra gets 1 megaton. In addition, the US bases at North West Cape, Pine Gap, and Nurrungar each receive 300 kilotons as do Jervis Bay, Cockburn Sound and nine airfields outside the targeted cities. Seven oil or gas fields including Bass Strait and the North-West Shelf each get 1 megaton. These are summarized in Box 2.

"The problem with any scenario of a nuclear war is to choose a set of targets for fifty to sixty thousand nuclear warheads. There is so much overkill in the arsenals that the exercise becomes overwhelming."



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#### NUCLEAR WEAPONS DETONATED ON AUSTRALIA

as in the *AMBIO* Reference Scenario for a Nuclear War in 1985.

World	5750 Megatons (Mt)
Southern Hemisphere	173 Mt

Australia total 33 Mt., viz:—

Adelaide	1	Melbourne	3
Brisbane	1	Newcastle	1
Canberra	1	Perth	1
Geelong	1	Sydney	10
Hobart	1	Wollongong	1

U.S. bases (NW Cape, Pine Gap, Nurrungar, etc.) — 300 Kilotons (Kt) each

Cockburn Sound, Jervis Bay, 300 Kt each  
9 other airfields/bases 300 Kt each  
7 oil or gas fields 1 Mt each

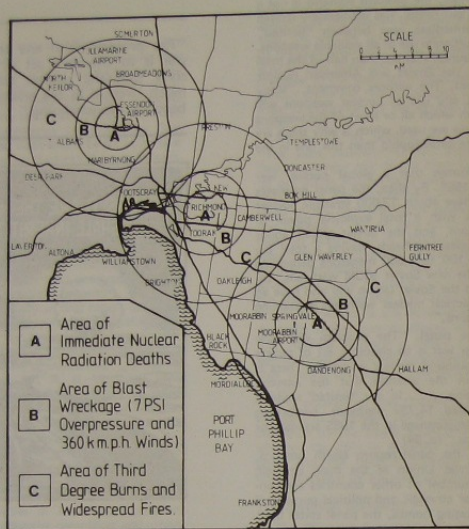
NOTE: Hiroshima was about 13 Kt.

Box 2

\* The term, strategic nuclear weapon, refers to one with an intercontinental range, whereas, tactical nuclear weapon refers to one with less than an intercontinental range (see Andrew Mack, "Is There a Soviet Threat?", *Peace Dossier*, No. 3 July 1982.)

\* The term, counterforce targets, refers to aiming your missiles at the other side's missiles, rather than at their cities, and assumes a first-strike policy. (See Alan Roberts, "Why We Have a War to Stop", *Peace Dossier*, No. 2 April 1982.)





### The Impact on the World and on Australia

What this would mean for Australia is best seen in the context of the other studies reported in the same issue of *AMBIO*. In their summing up, the advisory panel says of the world picture:

"The number of immediate or early deaths resulting from the effects of blast, fire, and heat in the nuclear exchange described here will approach 750 million (slightly more than half of the population of the cities bombed, and about 340 million will be seriously injured. To these casualties must be added those who will succumb to or be incapacitated by fire and heat.\* A considerable proportion of those who survive the blast, fire and heat will suffer from acute radiation sickness as a result of exposure to fallout. In addition, sublethal levels of ionizing radiation will lower resistance to infection, and diseases such as cholera and dysentery will spread rapidly in the absence of proper water and sanitation facilities." (p. 162)

The panel discussed many other effects . . . the desperate search for uncontaminated food and water, the vast smoke pall from uncontrolled urban, bush, and oil- and gas-field fires which blot out the sun for months, photochemical smog from the resulting fumes, destruction of ozone in the stratosphere (by oxides of nitrogen from the fireballs), leading to higher ultraviolet radiation with severe sunburn and "snow-blindness" (once the smoke clears), insect pests in plague proportions, the breakdown of transport, trade and supplies of many essential items, general economic collapse, and apathy, hopelessness, potential violence

\* Uncontrollable fires would be lit by the explosions, causing death and injuries in addition to those resulting from the direct radiant heat of the fireballs.

and anarchy amongst the survivors.

Jonathan Schell in his powerful book, *The Fate of the Earth*, suggests that it is possible that we will face the extinction of all human life. This seems to me, especially in the light of the *AMBIO* findings, to be a real possibility for the Northern Hemisphere, but less likely in the south. Many of the worst ecological effects, such as hemisphere-wide radioactive fallout, smoke, photochemical smog and ozone destruction will be much more severe in the Northern than in the Southern Hemisphere due to the many more bombs exploded in the north and the rather slow exchange of air between the hemispheres. The average time for such an inter-hemispheric exchange is about 1 or 2 years, by which time many of the effects will be considerably reduced. Human societies may well survive in parts of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, Africa and South America, especially in rural areas having a subsistence economy, which is not dependent on outside trade and high technology.

Considering its small population and the high concentration of its people, industry, and communications centres in a rather small number of cities, Australia will, according to the *AMBIO* scenario, be relatively badly hit. Judging from the global figures given by *AMBIO*, we must expect that about half our total population will be killed, more or less immediately, and perhaps another quarter sufficiently seriously injured or incapacitated by radiation sickness, contaminated food and water, and disease that they will die in the following few months. Most of our major secondary industries will be destroyed along with the hubs of our road, air, and sea transport services, a high proportion of all vehicles, their assembly plants and spare parts, all our major oil and gas fields and electrical power distribution centres, and our limited fresh water supplies will be heavily contaminated by fallout.

In case this seems to be extreme, let us look at the immediate effect on Melbourne of three 1-megaton bombs as postulated by the *AMBIO* panel. Soviet military strategists may well have precise priority targets for each of these bombs within the greater Melbourne area, but let us simply assume they are dropped more or less in a straight line about 20 km apart, so as to explode some 300 metres above the ground . . . the first between the Tullamarine and Essendon Airports, the second on Richmond, and the third in Springvale. This is shown on the accompanying map. Each would have a fireball of radius about 1.1 km within which everything would be vaporized. Neutron and gamma radiation would be fatal out to a radius of some 2½ km; blast damage would wreck most buildings out to about 5 km radius (the pressure would be increased 50% over normal pressure and the winds would be about 360 km per hour); heat radiation would give lethal burns to at least half the people with exposed skin (assuming medical treatment and no other injuries), and start fires out to about 11 km radius. The precise radius for the various effects, especially heat radiation, would depend on cloudiness, the number of particles in the air, the height of the detonation, topography and other factors.

On this basis, within the greater Melbourne area, most people would be killed, seriously injured, or threatened by fire, more or less immediately within an area of some 60 km long, running from beyond Tullamarine Airport and North Keilor on the northwest to Dandenong and Hallam in the southeast, and 20 km wide from Deer Park, Williamstown and Mordialloc on the southwest side to Somerton, Doncaster and Wantirna on the northeast side. Large sections of all major road and rail links would be vaporized with many key bridges destroyed. Melbourne City Centre, the Port of Melbourne, Tullamarine, Essendon and Moorabbin Airports would be razed by fire, even where not demolished by the blast waves. The Ford plant at Broadmeadows along with the General Motors plant at Dandenong would be destroyed, as would the munitions and explosives plant at Deer Park and the defence facilities at Maribyrnong. An additional 300-kiloton bomb might well be targeted to destroy Laverton Air Force Base and the Altona petrochemical complex on the western side of the city. Elsewhere in Victoria the *AMBIO* scenario has 1 megaton bombs targeted on Geelong and the Bass Strait oil and gas fields, and a 300 kiloton bomb on the Sale Air Force Base.

The vast area of 1200 square kilometres directly affected by the three 1 megaton bombs on Melbourne would not only burn, but depending on the weather, fires could sweep north, east or south to destroy many of the outlying suburbs and on into the bush of the Plenty Ranges, the Dandenongs and the Mornington Peninsula. The radioactive fallout plume from each 1 megaton bomb (i.e. the cloud of radioactive particles which would drift downwind and gradually fall to the ground or be washed out in the rain) would spread lethal levels of radioactivity over several times the immediate area. According to *AMBIO*, the geographical contour line within which one half of the people would have received enough radiation to kill them within a month or so (450 rad) would cover 2900 square kilometres. Melbourne's sewerage, gas, oil, electricity and water distribution networks would be destroyed, while the gas, oil and electricity supplies would most likely be cut off at their sources. Melbourne's water supply reservoirs would be contaminated by radioactivity and clogged with soot, while the catchment areas would most likely be burnt, and quickly eroded by following rains. Practically all hospitals, with the possible exception (depending on fire and fallout patterns) of relatively small outlying hospitals in places like Werribee, Ferntree Gully and Dandenong, would be destroyed or incapacitated along with practically all metropolitan fire fighting services.

The plight of the hundreds of thousands of short-term survivors suffering from burns, radiation sickness and other injuries, would be grim indeed. Even the uninjured survivors in the 'more fortunate' outer suburbs and surrounding countryside would have to make terrible choices between helping the sick and injured, and harbouring refugees, on the one hand, and marshalling and saving their own limited supplies and resources for survival on the other. No more petrol, electricity or bottled gas supplies could be expected for the foreseeable future, nor spare parts for automobiles, tractors, generators, or other machinery. Medicines and other essential supplies such as paper, soap, manufactured clothing and non-locally produced food would no longer be replenished. No help could be expected from other major cities or from overseas countries, as most of these would be at least as badly affected.

The overall effect on Australia of a war such as that envisaged by the *AMBIO* panel is again best put in the global perspective summarised by the panel:

"Although the impact of the nuclear war described in this issue would be widespread and terrible, there would probably be survivors. Their fate, however, is extremely uncertain. The human and social environment in which they will have to live will be changed far beyond our comprehension. In addition to wartime destruction and poisoning, the natural environment might suffer such grave long-term changes as to severely threaten the survivors' fight for recovery. In any case societies as we know them today will most certainly cease to exist." (p. 162)

Australia may well be less affected by such a nuclear war than Europe, North America and the Soviet Union, but we would not escape catastrophic effects.

### Survival and Political Realism

We have seen above that there is a marked contrast between the complacency and optimism of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which sees little likelihood of a nuclear attack on the highly populated areas of Australia, and the 'moderate' scenario of the panel of experts advising the Swedish Academy of Sciences. The latter has every Australian city of over 100,000 people hit by at least 1 megaton of nuclear explosives, with the likely sequence of the more or less immediate death of over half of Australia's population.

There is a marked contrast between the complacency and optimism of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence which sees little likelihood of a nuclear attack on the highly populated areas of Australia and the 'moderate' scenario of the panel of experts advising the Swedish Academy of Sciences.

This contrast seems to derive from a radically different assessment of the available nuclear warheads and targeting priorities of the Soviet Union. Thus the Joint Committee appeals to "the need of the Soviet Union . . . to concentrate on targets which are of a higher priority than Australian cities," since the Soviet Union "has less nuclear warheads than potential 'counterforce' targets" (p. 28), while the *AMBIO* panel states that, "The problem with any scenario of a nuclear war is to choose a set of targets for fifty to sixty thousand nuclear warheads" (p. 94), and then proceeds to target major population centres in countries belonging to the Eastern and Western alliances first, then the remaining military, industrial and resource targets in those countries. Even so, the *AMBIO* panel uses up less than half the mega-



### CRITICISMS OF THE AMBIO SCENARIO

Critics of the *AMBIO* scenario, in so far as it affects Australia, variously argue that it is unrealistic because:—

- Nuclear weapons are only about 60-70% reliable.
- Many weapons will be destroyed by "counter-force" missiles.
- The *AMBIO* scenario unrealistically targets neutral countries like India, so why take it seriously in regard to Australia?
- Considering the total number of military targets in the Western alliance, the Soviets do not have enough delivery vehicles to give priority to Australian cities, many of which are too far apart to be hit by warheads from a single, multiple-warhead missile.
- Smaller, "limited" nuclear wars are possible, and some say more likely.

### RESPONSE

In reply, Frank Barnaby, one of the authors of the scenario who has recently been a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University, points out that:—

- War games and computer simulated wars upon which the US military bases its strategies do not assume such low reliability figures as 60-70%.
- Strategic and tactical nuclear weapons would only be destroyed on the ground by a successful first strike. This could come from either side, and such a first strike would include or quickly be followed by attacks on cities to destroy the potential for recovery of the targeted superpower and its allies. What is more likely is a near simultaneous launching of missiles by both sides, with few nuclear weapons destroyed on the ground.
- The *AMBIO* scenario is admittedly unrealistic in targeting neutral countries like India, which was

done in order to be "non-political." As far as Australia is concerned all this means is that even more weapons would be available for use on allies of the superpowers such as Australia.

d) It is acknowledged (p. 94) that there are in total more military targets than warheads used in the scenario. However many of these targets are in major cities and others are relatively minor and may well have lower priority than major urban-industrial-transport centres. Moreover, the scenario is for a war in 1985. During the 1980's both the United States and the Soviets plan to add another 6000 or so warheads each to their nuclear arsenals. A few Soviet Backfire bombers based in Vietnam or a couple of Soviet strategic nuclear submarines could inflict on Australia most of the damage envisaged in the *AMBIO* scenario. In addition, major Australian cities such as Sydney and Melbourne represent such high concentrations of population, industry and communications that as targets they are a highly efficient use of limited weapons capabilities. Even if we concede that cities such as Hobart, Geelong and Newcastle may not rate highly enough to be on the Soviet target list, it seems likely that major cities such as Sydney and Melbourne will. It would at least be prudent to admit the possibility and consider the cost.

e) Smaller "limited" nuclear wars are theoretically possible, but in the view of many experts they are most likely to escalate. Even a "limited" nuclear war would be catastrophic and could involve Australia (e.g. Australia being traded for Cuba in a "limited" exchange). Obviously what actually happens in a future nuclear war will depend on particular circumstances, such as where, why, and how it starts, shifting alliances and degrees of support, and the chance disposition of mobile forces. Nevertheless, there is a finite and growing probability of a war such as is envisaged in the *AMBIO* scenario.

Box 3

tonnage estimated to be available in 1985. Further arguments concerning the realism of the Swedish scenario are given in Box 3.

It is interesting, but perhaps not very fruitful to speculate on the psychological or political motives which lead to such contrasting assessments. The *AMBIO* panel, with no special interest in Australia emotionally or politically, might be expected to be more objective about Australia and at the same time closer to the strategic thinking and nuclear realities of the nuclear armed world powers which see Europe as the main potential theatre for nuclear confrontation. Clearly they see Australia as one amongst a number of US allies . . . to be treated little differently than the others.

The Australian Joint Committee on the other hand has both strong psychological and political reasons for wanting, perhaps subconsciously, to minimise the threat posed to Australia by our alliance with the United States. The defence policies of all major parties in this country have long been based on the American alliance

If the risks of nuclear attack posed by the American alliance are in fact far greater than the Committee admits, as the Swedish scenario strongly suggests, then the balance is decisively tipped against full participation in the American alliance.

as our insurance against overwhelming attack. In the Committee's own words, "The ANZUS Alliance is likely to act as a deterrent against those potentially hostile actions against Australia that would be beyond Australia's own capabilities." The Committee first minimises the risks of nuclear attack entailed in the US alliance and then argues that these risks "are outweighed by the advantages Australia derives from its alliance with the United States." (p. 53) Other circumstances of threat from regional powers were considered to be minimal by the Committee.

If the risks of nuclear attack posed by the American alliance are in fact far greater than the Committee admits, as the Swedish scenario strongly suggests, then the balance is decisively tipped against full participation in the American alliance.

This is very plainly an unpalatable conclusion for many Australians, because it places the self-interest of Australians in their survival into conflict with our longstanding reliance on "great and powerful allies" and the conventional wisdom as to our economic and political interests as a close ally of the United States.

In view of this apparent conflict we need to be quite clear that the self-interest of Australians in their own physical, political and economic survival, which would seem to demand an end to our alliance with the United States, is not in any fundamental sense anti-American. If the Swedish or indeed most other scenarios for a major nuclear war are to be taken seriously, then the survival of the American people, the American political system, and the American economy is even more threatened by nuclear war than is our own.

Our interest in ending our part in a military alliance with any nuclear power, which means in our case the alliance with America, is coincident with the real interests of the United States and its people. Our military alliance with America encourages the US government's reliance on nuclear weapons and contributes to the threat of nuclear war as the major thrust of its defence and foreign policy. This reliance threatens the very existence of the United States, far more than any possible invasion of the United States or loss of American power in the world.

For many Australians the relevance of the Swedish (or any other) scenario depends on whether they continue to have faith in the deterrent effect of the growing and increasingly sophisticated nuclear arsenals. Unfortunately, with the development of smaller but more accurate strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, classical nuclear deterrence is no longer the only use of nuclear weapons which is being contemplated by the superpowers. The superpowers are increasingly moving towards "counter-force" and "first-strike" capabilities, and the threatened use of tactical nuclear weapons as instruments for asserting national interests in areas such as the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. In such situations of threat and counter-threat we can only hope and pray that one nuclear power will never call the other's bluff. In the long run, as one crisis follows another, such hopes must wear thin. Indeed, the risk of nuclear war by escalation or miscalculation increases daily as more and more strategic and tactical nuclear weapons are deployed and more and more countries develop nuclear weapons capabilities (e.g. South Africa, Israel, India, Pakistan, Argentina, Brazil).

For these reasons the need to move toward nuclear disarmament is urgent and growing. As we have seen in the case of the *AMBIO* scenario, it could be a matter

### JONATHAN SCHELL THE FATE OF THE EARTH

"As long as politics fails to take up the nuclear issue in a determined way, it lives closer than any other activity to the lie that we have all come to live — the pretense that life lived on top of a nuclear stockpile can last. Meanwhile, we are encouraged not to tackle our predicament but to inure ourselves to it: to develop a special, enfeebled vision, which is capable of overlooking the hugely obvious; a special, sluggish nervous system, which is conditioned not to react even to the most extreme and urgent peril; and a special, constricted mode of political thinking, which is permitted to creep around the edges of the mortal crisis in the life of our species but never to meet it head on. In this timid, crippled thinking, "realism" is the title given to beliefs whose most notable characteristic is their failure to recognize the chief reality of the age, the pit into which our species threatens to jump; "utopian" is the term of scorn for any plan that shows serious promise of enabling the species to keep from killing itself (if it is "utopian" to want to survive, then it must be "realistic" to be dead); and the political arrangements that keep us on the edge of annihilation are deemed "moderate," and are found to be "respectable," whereas new arrangements, which might enable us to draw a few steps back from the brink, are called "extreme" or "radical." With such fear-filled, thought-stopping epithets as these, the upholders of the status quo defend the anarchistic structure of their thinking, and seek to block the revolution in thought and in action which is necessary if mankind is to go on living.

Box 4

Survival is not anti-American, nor anti-anybody. It is pro-life.

of our own survival, and, as Jonathan Schell suggests, possibly of the survival of the human race.

Survival is not anti-American, nor anti-anybody. It is pro-life. It is just as much an issue and a concern for conservatives, capitalists, and Catholics as it is for radicals, socialists and Quakers. For example, as many Catholics have come to realise, those who campaign against abortion must be at least as concerned about the threat to present and future generations posed by nuclear weapons.

In the past, as Jonathan Schell puts it: "Conservatism in personal and social questions has often gone together with militarism . . .", but now, "Alert and realistic conservatives, by contrast, would see that everything that anyone might wish to conserve is threatened by nuclear weapons, and would recognize in them a threat not only to the 'old values' but to any values whatsoever. And instead of dreaming of the vanished wars of past times they would place themselves in the forefront of a movement for disarmament."

Our politicians may tell us that the "moderate", "respectable" and "electorally acceptable" policy is to stay in ANZUS and to co-operate in the nuclear strategy of our superpower ally. But the responsible, realistic course, the one that may ensure our physical survival and that of our political institutions and traditions, is to withdraw from any nuclear alliances, and thereby aiding Australia, and to do our best to dissuade both superpowers to end their reliance on nuclear weapons, and thereby aiding the world. There is no greater threat to all we value and hold dear than nuclear weapons. We must cry "STOP!" before it is too late.

### FURTHER READING:

*AMBIO*, Special Issue on "Nuclear War: The Earthmath." Volume XI, Nos. 2-3, 1982. (Available from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, P.O. Box 50005, S-104 05 Stockholm, Sweden, US \$15 airmail).

Desmond Ball, *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate: American Installations in Australia* (Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1980), \$10.95. Also see Desmond Ball, "American Bases in Australia," *Peace Dossier*, No. 1 (Victorian Association for Peace Studies, Melbourne, 1982), 70c.

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Edward M. Kennedy and Mark O. Hatfield, *Freeze! How You Can Help Prevent Nuclear War* (Bantam Books, New York, 1982), US \$3.50.

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Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (Picador, London, 1982), \$5.95.

R. J. Smith, "Pentagon Moves Toward First-Strike Capability," *Science*, Volume 216, pp 596-598, 7 May 1982.

E. P. Thompson and Dan Smith (editors), *Protest and Survive*, (Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1980), \$3.95.



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#### VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR PEACE STUDIES: PEACE DOSSIERS

The Victorian Association for Peace Studies is an open association of people interested in study, research and education on issues of war and peace. This issue of *Peace Dossier* is presented as a contribution to public information and debate on these issues. Within VAPS a variety of viewpoints are expressed, and the organisation holds no party political position. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author.

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