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The War in Ukraine and the Nuclear Revolution: A thread

Why has Russia's brutal invasion not escalated into a major war? Such wars have been triggered in the past by less outrageous aggression, most notably WW1 <https://t.co/ZplFwPlczs>



Yet the US and NATO have explicitly declared that they will not intervene militarily in the war to defend Ukraine, despite a clear moral imperative to do so and the threat to European security.

Everyone knows the answer to this question: it is because of the fear that such an intervention could lead to a nuclear war.

This nuclear-war aversion was, according to the late and genuinely great Robert Jervis, the defining feature of great power politics in the nuclear age. He called this change the 'nuclear revolution.' <https://t.co/Co5gEWj7C3>

Robert Jervis

**THE MEANING
OF THE
NUCLEAR
REVOLUTION**

**Statecraft
and the Prospect of
Armageddon**

There are several ways to define the nuclear revolution, but a succinct one is the statement by Reagan and Gorbachev in 1986, recently repeated by the Security Council. 'A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.'

Note that this declaration has two components. One is the positivist claim that a nuclear war cannot be won; the other, a normative demand that it ought not be fought.

Many IR scholars, for good reason, try to avoid incorporating normative demands into their work. Trying to stay objective and scientific. But on nuclear war this distinction always gets forgotten.

Kenneth Waltz, for example, insisted in his pathbreaking book *Man the State and War* that IR theorists must reject normative analysis at all costs. Yet after 1980 he spent the last three decades of his life arguing that the spread of nuclear weapons was a force for peace. <https://t.co/Cj8guXyWiv>

man the State and War

a
theoretical
analysis

Kenneth N. Waltz

With a new preface

WHY IRAN SHOULD GET THE BOMB: A NEOREALIST POINT OF VIEW

- Kenneth Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb:", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2010
- Power Begs to be Balanced
 - Israel is the monopoly in nuclear power in the region
 - Israel bombed Iraq in 1981, and Syria in 2007 to prevent them from acquiring a nuclear weapon, could do the same to Iran
 - Since Israel acquired a nuclear weapon, the region has been in conflict
- Unfounded Fears
 - Iran is rational
 - Countries are less hostile once they get nuclear capabilities (China, India and Pakistan)



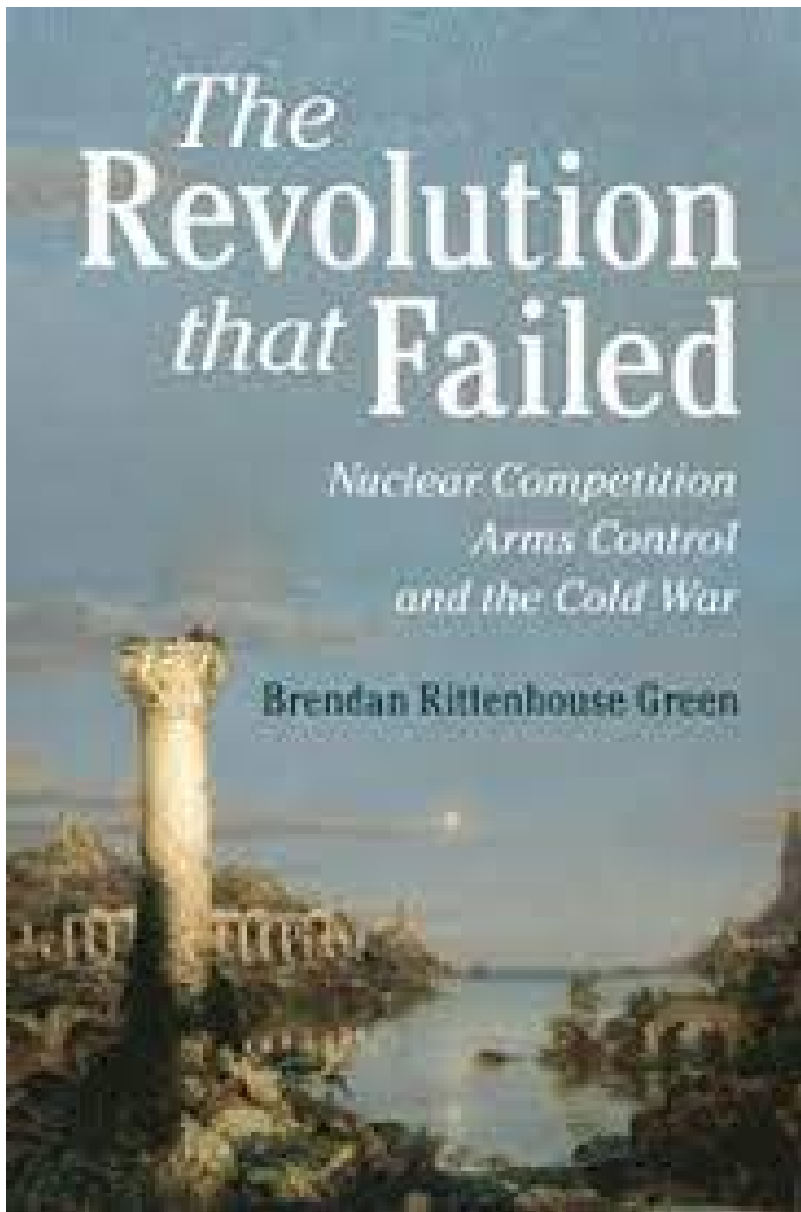
All of this seems uncontroversial and obvious to most. Yet many contemporary writers argue that the nuclear revolution is a myth - that the aversion to nuclear war has not transformed great power politics. <https://t.co/nAmMtAoEg0>

KEIR A. LIEBER AND DARYL G. PRESS

THE MYTH OF THE
NUCLEAR REVOLUTION

POWER POLITICS
IN THE ATOMIC AGE





These 'new strategists' therefore argue that in certain circumstances, a nuclear war *can* be won and perhaps *should* be fought.

So we are witnessing a possible test of this argument. The US and NATO are far more powerful than Russia. America's technological capabilities in the nuclear field dwarf Russia's. According the logic of these strategists, we should expect the US/NATO to exploit these advantages.

Yet, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the superior side is acting very cautiously. It's unusual for a major power to announce that it will not intervene in a war.

Maybe the US and NATO will reverse their policy and present Russia with tangible threats, even at the risk of escalation to general war. If this happened, the new strategists would be proven right.

But here is the thing: no one wants the strategists to be proven right. Including, I feel sure, the strategists themselves.
END