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The Arrogance of Ideology

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Long-time advocate of US nuclear disarmament Bruce Blair has once again taken to print, attempting to browbeat and shame President Obama into changing US nuclear deterrence policy that has been endorsed by every President, Republican or Democrat, since the beginning of the nuclear age, including President Obama in his 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review*. In a recent September 28 [article](#) appearing in *Politico*, Blair repeats his many earlier calls for President Obama to endorse a US no-first-use of nuclear weapons policy. Such a step may sound progressive; but in reality it would likely weaken America's ability to deter massive military attacks by Russian, Chinese, and North Korean forces. It would undercut Allies' confidence in our extended deterrent, the US "nuclear umbrella," potentially prompting the development of their own nuclear weapons programs. And it would tarnish the legacy of the President of the United States.

None of these realities seem to concern Blair. Never himself having been in a position of responsibility for national policy or national security, he ridicules the advice given to the President by Secretary of Defense Carter, Secretary of State Kerry, and Secretary of Energy Moniz--all of whom have borne the mantle of responsible stewardship for decades and recently expressed their unanimous strong opposition to Blair's favored no-first-use nuclear policy.



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Similarly, Blair dismisses the demarches made by many allies, including the governments of the United Kingdom, France, Japan, and South Korea, to maintain the existing policy of purposeful ambiguity regarding nuclear use. This purposeful ambiguity is intended to compel opponents to consider the US nuclear deterrent if they ever would contemplate attacking us or our allies with massive conventional forces or weapons of mass destruction. This deterrent has a proven record of preventing highly-lethal attacks and is valued greatly as such by many allies. Citing some polling results from Western European elites, Blair asserts that our NATO allies have no investment in maintaining the existing nuclear deterrent posture. This claim ignores the results of the recent NATO summit in Warsaw at which the leaders of all 28 NATO countries and the Alliance's Secretary General not only supported current policy but strengthened it.

Because Blair's arguments in favor of no-first-use lack substance, he throws in one of the favorite red herrings employed by activists opposed to US nuclear weapons: that America's nuclear deterrent does not protect against covert operations, little green men or cyberattacks. But here Blair criticizes US nuclear forces for not doing what they never were intended to do. His red herring is akin to criticizing Army tanks for not sinking enemy submarines, when of course tanks are not intended to sink submarines. US nuclear weapons never were, are not, and never can be an all-purpose deterrent: they are intended to deter a potential enemy's attacks using major conventional military power and weapons of mass destruction against us or our allies. Other tools exist to deter those less-than-existential threats.

In promoting his activist agenda, Blair seeks to mislead President Obama by declaring that moving to no-first-use would enhance President Obama's legacy. Actually, the reverse is true. President Obama has made nuclear non-proliferation one of his national security priorities. Yet, moving to no-first-use would greatly unsettle key allies who rely on the US extended nuclear umbrella and thus threaten to kick-start new nuclear weapons programs, including in North East Asia, leaving the President's legacy in tatters by promoting proliferation rather than stopping it.

In addition, President Obama has cast himself as a leader of our longest-standing and most successful alliance: NATO. After a six month run-up to the recent NATO Warsaw Summit in which no-first-use was not discussed, and a successful summit at which no-first-use was not discussed, surprising NATO allies now with a last minute change of policy that many strongly oppose and would so endanger their security surely would tarnish the President's reputation as a reliable and honest ally.

And finally there is that "last minute" thing. Announcing major policy changes immediately before departing the White House has never reflected well on a President. Beginning with John Adams' "midnight judges," last minute acts have discredited the man and the office. Adopting a no-first-use policy now would similarly do so, and create serious new problems with allies and foes alike for the President's successor. It's a shame Blair seeks such a course for a President he professes to admire.

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