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**Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green. "Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 38:1-2 (2015): 38-73. DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2014.958150.**

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In this smart, provocative piece, Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green issue a ringing challenge to the conventional wisdom about the viability of secure, second-strike nuclear forces. As they note at the outset, "the ability of a nuclear force to absorb a preemptive attack and nonetheless retaliate with enough weapons to cause unacceptable damage" is "one of the central concepts in nuclear analysis" (38). The combination of an exponential increase in firepower<sup>2</sup> (such that all that came before was deemed 'conventional') and secure, or survivable, long-range airpower (land- and sea-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, specifically mobile ICBMs and SLBMs) has long been thought to render nuclear weapons

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<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to Jasen Castillo and Peter Dombrowski for their thoughtful and insightful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> See Keir A. Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Cornell University Press, 2005): 123.

revolutionary.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, scholars and analysts who focus on nuclear politics and strategy and the historical development of military power and strategy, particularly on military revolutions,<sup>4</sup> have embraced the notion of a nuclear revolution.<sup>5</sup> However, Long and Green argue, second-strike mobile land- or sea-based ballistic missile nuclear forces are not as invulnerable to preemptive attack as some have assumed. “The United States,” they write, “has invested massive resources into intelligence capabilities for a first strike, including successful innovation in tracking submarines and mobile missiles.” (41). The heart of their piece is devoted to a systematically developed, carefully researched, well-documented account of the development of the Cold-War intelligence programs that enabled the United States to find and track relocatable Soviet nuclear assets (aka targets)—mobile ICBMs and ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs)—and the continuing post-Cold War development of intelligence capabilities in the hunt for mobile missiles. Long and Green’s bottom line, or “principal claim,” is that “American intelligence for counterforce operations has been far better than most knowledgeable experts have believed” (42).<sup>6</sup> In other words, intelligence, or the lack of intelligence, is not an obstacle to the employment of preemptive, first-strike, counterforce capabilities.

Long and Green’s “Stalking the Secure Second Strike” is a quite worthy winner of the Amos Perlmutter Prize and a welcome contribution to the “renaissances in nuclear security studies” hailed by Scott Sagan in a notable *H-Diplo/ISSF Forum* last year.<sup>7</sup> Much like the work of the historian Francis Gavin,<sup>8</sup> this piece by Long and Green bridges the disciplinary divide between the largely separate nuclear renaissances in history and political science highlighted by Sagan.<sup>9</sup> In their detailed accounts of Cold-War intelligence developments, ranging from project “Wringer,” early espionage, signals intelligence (SIGINT) and overflight programs to

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<sup>3</sup> Not secure, second-strike capabilities alone.

<sup>4</sup> Or revolutions in military affairs and, more recently, military transformation.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Cornell University Press, 1989); Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics before and after Hiroshima* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History 1500 to Today* (Gotham Books, 2004); Andrew F. Krepinevich, “Cavalry to Computer: The Pattern of Military Revolutions,” *The National Interest* 37 (Fall 1994): 30-42; Lieber, *War and the Engineers*; Williamson Murray and MacGregor Knox, “Thinking about Revolutions in Warfare,” in MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, eds., *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300-2050* (Cambridge University Press, 2001): 1-14;

<sup>6</sup> And “American intelligence capabilities for counterforce have been pursued far more vigorously and successfully than generally credited” (65).

<sup>7</sup> Scott D. Sagan, “Two Renaissances in Nuclear Security Studies,” What We Talk About When We Talk About Nuclear Weapons, *H-Diplo/ISSF Forum*, No. 2 (2014): 2-10, <http://issforum.org/forums/2-what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-nuclear-weapons>

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America’s Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press, 2012); and “What We Talk About When We Talk About Nuclear Weapons: A Review Essay,” *H-Diplo/ISSF Forum*, No. 2 (2014): 11-36, <http://issforum.org/forums/2-what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-nuclear-weapons>

<sup>9</sup> Though this piece by Long and Green remains blessedly free of much of what passes for political science today.

ocean surveillance capabilities such as the Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS), the Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System (SURTASS), U.S. Navy and National Security Agency SIGINT and the development of satellite-based SIGINT and UAVs to map and track mobile land-based ballistic missiles, Long and Green effectively, and quite impressively, mine and integrate a wealth of primary and secondary sources.

Long and Green's piece will be warmly welcomed by those inclined to conventionalize or mainstream nuclear weapons and support the development of counterforce options, such as lower yield, more precise nuclear capabilities. It will be more coolly greeted by the proponents of the nuclear consensus that they target. Even though Long and Green explicitly attempt "to clarify the nature and limits of" their argument and caution that their "claims should not be confused with stronger arguments" that they "do not make" (41), their targets will no doubt object to the relatively frequent use of terms such as "surely," "suggestive," "could have," "strong suggestions," "likely," and "could" (50-54, 64) to characterize Cold-War and post-Cold War intelligence capabilities.

Long and Green recognize, if not celebrate, the potentially far-reaching nuclear policy implications of their analysis. If the intelligence capabilities they have detailed imperil the security of second-strike forces to the extent that they suggest, the presumed benefits—"general stability, crisis stability, status-quo bias, and peace" (65)—of those forces are imperiled as well. Not only is nuclear politics more complicated, but the "technological explosion" (65) harnessed by the U.S. military and the U.S. intelligence community has substantially lowered the nuclear threshold. The temptation to preempt, enhanced by advances in accuracy as well as intelligence, undermines crisis stability. A more delicate balance of terror is, as Long and Green recognize, "destabilizing and dangerous" (66). Though some adversaries will be dissuaded by a U.S. nuclear primacy thought to rest less on a secure, second-strike capability than on a credible first-strike, counterforce capability, others, especially major powers, that are cognizant of how the United States has exploited its conventional primacy, particularly after 9/11, will feel compelled to run the nuclear race. To crisis instability will be added arms-race instability. Nuclear security dilemmas, arguably, will be exacerbated rather than ameliorated. Long and Green begin to explore the implications of their argument for nuclear dynamics and U.S. policy. But the broader world order implications of an apparent U.S. nuclear primacy that rests in no small part on perceived first-strike, counterforce capabilities requires greater attention.

The U.S. response to its nuclear primacy will be critical. It 'wouldn't be prudent' for the United States to exploit its nuclear primacy as it has its conventional primacy. Nuclear hubris could readily lead the United States to do (more) 'stupid stuff.' Grand strategic restraint—if not that of Ikenberry at least that of Posen<sup>10</sup>—and reassurance are in order. The role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national-security and military strategies

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<sup>10</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

should be minimized rather than maximized.<sup>11</sup> And the nuclear taboo, or the norm or tradition of non-use, should be reinforced rather than undermined by concerted efforts to lower the nuclear threshold.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> More the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review than its predecessor. On reducing the centrality of nuclear weapons in U.S. doctrine and strategy see Thomas M. Nichols, *No Use: Nuclear Weapons and U.S. National Security* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); T. V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford University Press, 2009).