Nuclear Weapons and Intergenerational Exploitation

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‘An tremendous force for peace’—Kenneth Waltz

- Terrifying—hence a powerful deterrent
- Miscalculating results of war is all but impossible
- Favour defenders
- Arms races, security-motivated expansion are unnecessary
‘A Faustian bargain’

• Nukes reduce the risk of war
• …at the cost of vast destruction if full scale war breaks out
Even Waltz admits nuclear war is possible

- 'No one can say that nuclear weapons will never be used. Their use is always possible….' (2003)
- ‘The probability of nuclear war among states having nuclear weapons approaches zero.’ (1990)
Suppose Waltz is right: nuclear war is inevitable

- Wait long enough...and unlikely things are sure to happen!
- New competitions are coming
- ‘To believe that this can go on indefinitely without major disaster requires an optimism unjustified by any historical or political perspective.’--Lawrence Freedman
Is unlimited thermonuclear war inevitable?

- Waltz argues that states would have strong incentives to limit a nuclear exchange
- But *eventually* powerful states will use large numbers
- The great powers are the biggest threat
A Faustian bargain--but who pays the bill?

- *We* buy ourselves a lower chance of dying in war...
- …at the price of all following generations when deterrence breaks down
- Unlike Faust, we send our *descendants* to hell
Intergenerational exploitation

Goodness! It says here that the world population will double in the next 35 years and we are fast consuming our finite resources!

That is assuming there is no catastrophic war!

In any event, we won’t be around... so don’t worry about it!

That’s easy enough for him to say!
Three issues that I’ll skip here

- The philosophical underpinnings of why deterrence is exploitative (contractarian theory, theories of rights, utilitarianism)
- The non-identity problem
- Would it be wrong to wipe out the species?
What won’t work…

- Disarmament
- Missile defence
Minimum deterrence

- 100-200 nukes should be enough
- Who is going to risk losing Moscow, Birmingham or Tehran?
- When war does break out, damage will be horrible but not risk human extinction
- Realists should favour it even if it could be less stable, since we externalise fewer costs
Could deep cuts short-circuit progress toward peace?

• Liberals and constructivists can argue this, but not neo-realists

• If the US and Russia *do* defend huge arsenals on this ground, they should be doing more to promote world peace
In sum.....

- Nuclear war is coming, sooner or later
- Nuclear deterrence exploits future generations
- Non-nuclear states should not get the bomb
- Nuclear states should make deep cuts