

Implications of the “Nuclear Winter” Thesis

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During the Cold War, U.S. national security policy regarding nuclear weapons revolved around deterrence. In order to prevent all-out nuclear war, the U.S. needed to maintain nuclear weapons to discourage a nuclear conflict from arising. This policy continued even as the Soviet Union started to fall. Other potentially hostile nations had acquired the means to begin a nuclear weapons program. New scientific evidence about the long-term devastation caused by nuclear war reinforced the need to prevent new nations from commencing a nuclear weapons program.

This report examines the policy implications of the long-term atmospheric, climatic and biological effects of nuclear war. Potential policy implications discussed include policies regarding nuclear weapons strategy and deterrence, extended deterrence, and targeting.

"But the nuclear winter findings could lead to a reevaluation of the criteria and means of minimizing damage to one's country while at the same time achieving wartime goals.

The U.S. is likely to seek to minimize the immediate destruction of u.s. territory by nuclear weapons even if a nuclear winter could eventually engulf the entire Northern Hemisphere or even the whole planet." (p 40)

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