

"The Unthinkable": Open letter to IEEE Spectrum

Written by

Tuesday, 06 October 2009 16:57 - Last Updated Tuesday, 06 October 2009 21:35

The following article is a short version of an open letter to IEEE Spectrum magazine, in relation to a series of publications regarding USA policies against contemporary threats. It was prepared and published as a response to the article "Not so unthinkable", written by James E. Gover and Paul G. Huray, which raised some serious questions about the intention and relevance of its subject in relation to the general area of interest of both the magazine core, as well as the majority of its subscribers.

As it turns out, the response from subscribers from around the world was so overwhelming that the magazine decided to publish several of them in the next issue. Executive Editor (Glenn Zorpette) and Region 8 representative (Laura Roa) also responded to this open letter by personal email, stating their complete agreement with the remarks raised here.

See also:

- ["The Unthinkable" - Response from IEEE](#)
- ["Unthinkable Weaponry" - Response](#)
- [Download the full text \(pdf\)](#)

To: "Forum", IEEE Spectrum Magazine,
3 Park Ave., 17th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

Cc: IEEE Spectrum Online Editorial Staff
Laura Roa, IEEE Region 8 representative
IEEE Region 8 representative office, NTUA, Greece
IEEE Greek chapter, UPATRAS, Greece

Dear Sirs,

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In the March 2003 issue of the IEEE Spectrum Magazine, the article "Not so unthinkable", presented by James E. Gover and Paul G. Huray, raises some serious questions about the intention and relevance of its subject in relation to the general area of interest of both the magazine core, as well as the majority of its subscribers. In this article, Gover and Huray discuss the feasibility of using nuclear weapons of limited scale, in cases where conventional ammunition seems to be ineffective. The specific article is only the conclusion of a series of publications of similar content, clearly political in nature and totally outside the scope and technical nature of the specific magazine.

The assertion that the use of tactical nuclear weapons of small scale, often called as "mini-nukes", does not necessarily conclude to tremendous casualties of civilians, is totally inaccurate. The presentation of similar weapons as the ideal means of destroying biological and chemical weapons is very misleading as well. Worth noted for is the fact that, in the rather extensive article by James E. Gover and Paul G. Huray, there is not one mention to the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons to the environment.

Especially for underground detonations, even though the initial disperse of radioactive material into the atmosphere is much more limited in relation to a surface or aerial one, however the extremely long half-life period of these materials, sooner or later, constitutes their evident propagation to other areas a sure fact. The soil of the ground that receives the blast of one single 5 KT nuclear warhead becomes barren and agriculturally dead in a range of 1.5 miles for over 230000 years, while the residuals of the enriched uranium used in the nuclear warhead continues to radiate for over 4.5 billion years, that is equal to the current estimation of Earth's age. There is a clear danger of radiological contamination of the underground water reservoirs of the greater area, evidently resulting to the contamination of all the native population within a relatively short period of time, while at the same time the disperse of residuals and contaminated soil to other areas through rivers and the sea constitutes a possible threat to the complete ecosystem of the neighboring countries. Fortunately, these hazardous results of these weapons on areas with soil and underground properties similar to the ground of Iraq, with all the extensive underground and surface water networks present, has not been realized yet in the recent conflict.

The imminent danger from the gradual unblocking of using nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in general, is not related just to the local theater of the battlefield. As these weapons gradually become more "gentle" in essence regarding the public reactions and their deployment is presumably not necessarily accompanied with the same social and political consequences as during the Cold War era, the mere role of military command centers is literally upgraded against the political centers, as the responsibility and tactical initiative is transferred to them. At the same time, the egocentric views regarding "good" and "evil" regimes is substantially advanced, as each regime perceives its own weapons of mass destruction as a

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deterrent measure against similar threats or against the aggressiveness, or mere suspicion, of other possible hostiles. Only now, in contrast to the Cold War era, the limited power and destruction scale of these weapons constitutes them tremendously more dangerous and aggressive, in relation to the possibility of the actual use in a real battlefield, instead of just a deterrent measure in political and strategic-military level.

Of course, no one seems to seriously care about the ethical dimension of this issue. The one single mention to international disavowal in the whole article, regarding the consequences of using these weapons, is viewed under the scope of an "obstacle" for the strategic value of them, rather than a justified reaction against their use under any scale circumstances or justification. Maybe it is not clear to everyone that the social will and ethics of any nation is vastly more important than the intentions and the strategic options of the authority, military or not, that protects it.

During the time that the article of James E. Gover and Paul G. Huray was written, the new war on Iraq was just a probable possibility. Today, this scenario has already come to realization in the worst and most accurate way. It is evident that opinions and views of such matter and attribute can eventually affect, not only the current generations, but also many more that will follow. It is therefore crucial that they are investigated very carefully and cautiously, especially within the context and time of their presentation. Equally important for the magazine's editorial staff is the necessity to decide, whether the stand that they will adopt from now on will remain firmly on technical and engineering scope, or whether the magazine will become a place to express various political and social views by all (I hope) parties. I, personally, should not have any objection if letters like the current one would be published in parallel to articles like the ones examined above. Unfortunately, as a reader and subscriber of this magazine I would rather prefer not to deal with this kind of content if it deviates greatly from the magazine's initial core scope.

With regards,

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Original Article: J.E. Gover, P.G. Huray, "Not So Unthinkable", [IEEE Spectrum](#), March 2003, vol.40(3), pp.15-16.