



# Russell



Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare



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**'Bertrand Russell's eloquent and lucid analyses and warnings . . . should find a prominent place in the thinking of those who hope to reverse the seemingly inexorable drive towards self-destruction'**

*Noam Chomsky*



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Virtually the first words from the new administration in Washington declared their intent to proceed energetically with the National Missile Defense program, in the face of warnings even from their own intelligence agencies that this will greatly enhance threats to global and US security.

The Clinton administration had already urged Russia to move to a US-style 'launch-on-warning' strategy, truly 'bizarre,' specialists warned, particularly because in light of the deterioration of their control systems. Presidential directives continue to authorize first use even against non-nuclear states, and have extended nuclear capacities, which remain at the core of US strategic planning. Meanwhile proliferation proceeds in South Asia and the Middle East. In the face of such ominous threats, Bertrand Russell's eloquent and lucid analyses and warnings gain heightened significance, and should find a prominent place in the thinking of those who hope to reverse the seemingly inexorable drive towards self-destruction.

Noam Chomsky





## FOREWORD

*Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare* was first published in 1959, in an effort 'to prevent the catastrophe which would result from a large scale H-bomb war'. Nuclear technology had already evolved more and deadlier weapons, and these had created a new and more precarious balance of power. Public concern was growing. Russell's views changed in the years following Hiroshima, and were to change again, as the arms race became institutional and ever more costly. Military planning soared away into the realms of fantasy, but the reality was that mankind had developed hitherto unimagined destructive capacities.

Inevitably, Russell's writing about the bomb was dominated by the fact of the Cold War. Fear of Communism had already ranged the United States and its European allies into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. An Eastern Alliance, the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, had emerged shortly afterwards. Fear of Communism did not only stimulate military co-ordination: for a time, it also promoted economic co-operation, and the ascendancy throughout the West of what is now thought of as the

Keynesian world order. These were to be the years of a social welfare consensus in Western Europe, and of the emerging Common Market. Public planning and governmental intervention prospered in the West European economy as never before. Undoubtedly leaders such as Jean Monnet drew support from the business communities with which they were working, on the supposition that their policies would help to fortify the institutions of liberal democracy in the West. Were not Stalin's tanks massed along the newly defined Eastern border? And were not the Communist Parties in Italy and France able to count their votes in many millions?

But if the phobias of the time guaranteed a long period of full employment and relative prosperity, they also launched frenetic military competition. Ultimately the welfare consensus began to wear off: but the military confrontation proved more enduring.

Those who had worked on the development of the bomb in the United States had not expected that it should be tried out on cities without prior warning. They had presumed that a public test of its powers might be made at sea, or in some unpopulated area. In fact, the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki seems to have had little to do with military exigencies in the war with Japan, which was already drawing to a close. The presumption of many, politicians and scholars alike, is that the first nuclear bombardment took place in answer to the felt need of the American leadership, to send a chilling message to the Soviet Union.

In a very short time, Stalin showed that he had understood, and the Russians detonated their own bomb four years after the Hiroshima explosion. The Soviet hydrogen bomb followed inexorably, just as had the American fusion device.<sup>1</sup> The nuclear race was on. Soon after there opened the race to perfect intercontinental and other rockets, which might deliver the new weapons.

This contest was precisely encapsulated in the metaphor which Russell presented to describe it: