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Countdown to Zero – or to War on Iran?

Posted By [John V. Walsh](#)

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“If I was president Ahmadinejad’s national security adviser, and he asked me what to do, I would tell him to acquire a nuclear deterrent.”

John Mearsheimer’s imagined advice to Ahmadinejad leads to a simple and obvious conclusion. A country like Iran, which has been placed on the executioner’s list known as the “axis of evil,” may have only one option if it is to survive: get a nuclear deterrent (and notice Mearsheimer’s carefully chosen word is “deterrent”). The nukes need never be used, but they must be in one’s hand to keep one’s neck out of the Empire’s noose. Given the fate of bloodied, ravaged, and occupied Iraq, which did not get a nuke, and North Korea which did, the lesson is clear. It follows that the principal impulse for nuclear proliferation comes from the United States and Israel, since they are the countries now issuing threats of invasion, destruction, occupation, and servitude, threats they have routinely carried out. This is a message that will not be found in the allegedly anti-nuclear flick [Countdown to Zero](#), demonstrating one more time that the most effective lies are those of omission.

Countdown to Zero is now playing in a theater near you, at least if you live in a very “blue state” or a “blue neighborhood,” for example, Cambridge, Mass., my hometown, or San Francisco. The movie is aimed squarely at the antiwar, anti-nuclear, pro-Obama audience, which dwells therein and is all too susceptible to the “humanitarian” streak of imperialism. It is a very shrewd propaganda flick, as Darwin Bond-Graham demonstrated

in his superb [review](#), a film which in fact helps to pry open a little bit further the door to a war on Iran.

The film is divided roughly into two parts, the first warning of “nuclear terrorism,” emanating mainly from the brown-skinned world of Arabs and Muslims, although a few seconds are devoted to Japanese terrorists. The second part considers the possibility of an accidental nuclear war and the very fallible command-and-control systems for these instruments of mass murder. The problem is that these two issues are equated. A “terrorist” nuclear attack with one or even a few nuclear bombs would be a crime against humanity on the scale of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But terrible as this threat is, it is quite different from the existential danger posed by the U.S. and Russia, each with thousands of nukes on hair-trigger alert, subject to all the vagaries of technical failure, misjudgment, and miscalculation. An accidental or ill-considered nuclear exchange of this magnitude is of an entirely different scale, a slaughter worse than all the previous ones in human history combined, and a threat to the very existence of the species, given the real possibility of a nuclear winter. Osama bin Laden looks like a pesky mosquito compared to this danger. *Countdown* fails completely to draw that distinction.

The compulsory scenes of Muslim men chanting thanks to Allah for giving Pakistan the bomb were prominent in *Countdown*, but Harry Truman’s televised speech to the nation after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so vividly shown in the classic documentary [The Atomic Café](#), is missing. Truman told America that the bomb was a great gift and that God had given it to us. In his enthusiastic praise of the pro-American deity, dispensing radioactive hellfire even as Japan was scrambling to surrender, Truman did not thunder “God is great,” but he did not have to. The explosions that incinerated hundreds of thousands of Japanese were loud enough. America was out to show the world, and especially the Soviets, that it not only had nukes, but would not shrink from using its God-given gifts.

The segment of *Countdown* that deals with the possibility of a nuclear accident or miscalculation is of some worth and drew the participation of some well-meaning activists. In fact, most people do not know how close we have come to nuclear Armageddon on more than one occasion since the end of the Cold War. But it seems to this observer that this segment was used to sell the demonization of Iran and the Muslim world in the earlier segment. It also seems that removing the thousands of U.S. and Russian nukes from hair-trigger alert, which is a major threat now, can be readily accomplished. Obama and Medvedev ought to be able to do it with the strokes of two pens. But the U.S. and Russian heads of state are apparently unable to perform this simple act that would remove the nuclear sword of Damocles dangling so dangerously above us. The is due to the modern culture of empire, in part a product of the missionary zeal of Western civilization, which runs deep from Washington all the way to Moscow.

Coming at this time, *Countdown* appears designed in large part to scare those who are likely to be antiwar into supporting further moves by the Obama administration against Iran. The hoax of weapons of mass destruction, most notably nuclear weapons, was employed to frighten the American public into a war on Iraq. And now the same is being

done with Iran. As George W. Bush told us, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice....” Well, you know.