



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**Boekbespreking van: The nuclear revolution and the end of the Cold War: Forced restraint**  
Lieshout, R.H.

**Citation**

Lieshout, R. H. (1994). Boekbespreking van: The nuclear revolution and the end of the Cold War: Forced restraint. *Acta Politica*, 29: 1994(1), 83-89. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450209>

Version: Publisher's Version  
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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## Boekbesprekingen

G. van Benthem van den Bergh, **The nuclear revolution and the end of the Cold War: Forced restraint**. Houndmills, Basingstoke en Londen, Macmillan in association with the Institute of Social Studies, 1992.

The years after the fall of the Berlin Wall are first of all the years of false hope. The hope entertained by many that in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet empire Europe would enter an era of peaceful co-operation and economic prosperity, has proved to be illusory. Moreover, they are the years of settling old scores. The collapse of really existing socialism has provided many authors with the opportunity to establish once and for all that they had been right all along in the various protracted and heated debates that raged in the period of the Cold War. Such as the debate on the question of what the basic structure of a well-ordered society should look like and by what means it could be achieved, and the debate on the question whether war, in view of the spectacular development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles since 1945, could still be an instrument of foreign policy, at least as far as the relations of the superpowers are concerned. In his book *The nuclear revolution and the end of the Cold War* Van Benthem van den Bergh shows himself to be one of these authors. His book also contains learned observations on the effects of the nuclear revolution on processes of state formation and on the relations between states, but it is first and foremost a settlement of accounts with his adversaries from the past. On the one hand, the 'peace movement', those who were of the opinion that nuclear weapons could be abolished, and, on the other hand, the 'prenuclear thinkers' (as the author calls them), those who assumed that nuclear powers still could wage war against each other. Van Benthem van den Bergh is after the latter group in particular. In his view the representatives of the 'old thinking' are, more than anyone else, responsible for the situation that only recently politicians and policy-makers have begun to accept, reluctantly, the reality of common deterrence, a reality that should have been crystal clear after the Cuban Missile Crisis, more than thirty years ago.

*The nuclear revolution and the end of the Cold War* contains six chapters and an introduction. In this introduction Van Benthem van den Bergh formulates the two central propositions of the book. The first is to the effect that a violent

confrontation between the superpowers during the Cold War has been avoided, because already in the early stages of their rivalry it became clear to them that the nuclear revolution – which implies that a war between both powers can only lead to their ‘joint and absolute destruction’ (p. 3) – forced them to exercise the utmost restraint in their mutual relations. It is ‘the spectre of nuclear war [that] in various ways pushed the great powers in the direction of reciprocal restraint in potential and actual crisis and conflict situations’ (p. 3). The second proposition states that the old, pre-nuclear thinking is responsible for the fact that it took decades before the superpowers accepted the other implication of the nuclear revolution, namely that ‘in the nuclear age great powers can no longer hope or expect to defeat the opponent through superior military strength and/or a more clever military strategy’ (p. 3). During the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union ‘tended to keep seeing any gain in the military power, strategic position or political influence of their rival [as] a loss for themselves and vice versa (...) and they continued to design military strategies intended to outdo the enemy in the eventuality of war’ (p. 4).

In chapter 1, Van Benthem van den Bergh argues that a proper understanding of the problems of the nuclear age can only be achieved if they are placed in a long-term perspective. The perspective he adopts, is derived from Norbert Elias’s theory of state formation and civilization. According to Elias the central feature of the history of war and peace is the continuous growth in the size of so-called survival units. History shows ‘the strong, long-term tendency towards the formation of ever larger territorial units, with more and more complex patterns of organization and extended influence outside their borders’ (p. 27). This violent integration process culminates in the bipolar world that has come into being after the Second World War.

In chapter 2, Van Benthem van den Bergh explains the manner in which the nuclear revolution has prevented this process of the pacification of progressively larger territories from running its full course, so that the struggle for world hegemony predicted by Elias does not take place. From the start American leaders showed great restraint with respect to the possible use of atomic weapons. In their view Hiroshima and Nagasaki had demonstrated that atomic weapons could not be used in the same way as conventional weapons. In the course of the fifties one-sided restraint became two-sided, as the dramatic increase in destructive power resulting from the development of the hydrogen bomb and the ballistic missile made the rivals realize that they were confronted with a common danger. Their handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 made clear that by that time the superpowers had completed their *apprentissage de la coexistence* successfully. The crisis taught the United States and the Soviet Union once and for all that any violent confrontation between them, at whatever level of intensity, could result in their mutual destruction. ‘The Cuban crisis (...) threw then-fashionable ideas about limited war in the wastepaper basket and it brought home the true extent of the nuclear danger’ (p. 252). Since the Autumn of 1962 both superpowers have exercised the utmost restraint towards each other, and co-operated with each other, ‘if at times reluctantly’ (p. 116), in devising arran-

gements that might prevent a possible crisis from getting out of hand.

In the third chapter Van Benthem van den Bergh subsequently sets out to explain the apparent anomaly that the United States and the Soviet Union did ‘acknowledge the imperatives of the nuclear age in their crisis and conflict conduct, but stick to traditional pre-nuclear maxims in their strategic doctrines and weapons development’ (p. 124). He provides two explanations for ‘this nearly schizoid conduct’ (p. 116). Both explanations are almost exclusively based on American sources, since detailed information on the development of Russian weapon systems is still unavailable. The first explanation concerns the idea, inspired by the old thinking, that only superiority can guarantee security. According to this point of view, new weapons have to be developed continuously in order to prevent that a ‘window of opportunity’ presents itself to the opponent. The second explanation points to inter-service rivalry in the armed forces as a major driving force for the development of new weapons. Even today, the United States and Russia ‘have still not explicitly recognized the “absolute” perspective on nuclear weapons as the basis for a nuclear regime between them’ (p. 176).

Chapter 4 is devoted to the evolution of the concept of deterrence under the influence of the nuclear revolution. Originally, deterrence had to be one-sided and based on a clear superiority in military strength to be successful. But in the situation of common deterrence that exists between the two superpowers, deterrence is two-sided and there can no longer be any question of superiority. The United States and the Soviet Union find themselves in the position that ‘they were in fact no longer “deterred” by each other’s “deterrent”, but by an external force, equally strong for both. They face the shared risk that any serious crisis in their relations can inadvertently escalate to nuclear war. They can never be certain that they will be able to control escalation’ (p. 186). Thanks to the absolute weapon ‘risk calculation in the nuclear age is not the same as it was in the pre-nuclear age’ (p. 193). Common deterrence entails that the composition of the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers must be such that the threat of total destruction remains credible. For this reason nuclear weapons should not be too ‘active’ in character. They must be weapons of ‘truly last resort’.

Van Benthem van den Bergh begins the fifth chapter by arguing that it is futile to think that nuclear weapons can be abolished. Moreover, ‘a world without nuclear weapons might (...) be more dangerous than a world with nuclear weapons’ (p. 212). Subsequently, he analyses the attempts by the United States and the Soviet Union to escape the consequences of common deterrence, and to return to ‘normal’ pre-nuclear times. These attempts are the development of an anti-ballistic missile system (ABM) and the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). In his opinion, both were doomed to fail, as it is practically impossible to construct a defence powerful enough to prevent unacceptable damage in case of a nuclear attack. With respect to SDI, the author cannot keep himself from noting that ‘it seems even curious that such esoteric technology and esoteric arguments could have been taken seriously. It is an object lesson in the pitfalls of pre-nuclear thinking’ (p. 239).

Finally, in the concluding chapter Van Benthem van den Bergh discusses the problem how to establish the central monopoly of violence necessary for peace and security on a global level, now that, thanks to common deterrence, further integration by means of a 'great war' has become impossible. In his view the five existing nuclear powers must be able, by means of mutual co-operation within the institutional framework of the Security Council of the United Nations, to set up a nuclear regime that can take care of global pacification. The main tasks of this regime would be: 1) the preservation and improvement of common deterrence, 2) the prevention and control of crises by means of peace keeping and peace enforcement, and 3) the control of the spread of nuclear weapons. Such a 'global nuclear regime and great power co-operation in the Security Council appear to be the only road to global pacification' (p. 277).

Even if *The nuclear revolution and the end of the Cold War* is too polemical in tone, it is nevertheless a fascinating and stimulating book. Its greatest strength lies without doubt in the spirited way in which Van Benthem van den Bergh argues the case for the theory of common deterrence. And the history of the rivalry of the superpowers, as presented by him, seems to support his thesis. But is his argument also effective? Am I now convinced that he is right? I am afraid not. I am still doubtful as to the merits of his case in view of two considerations. The first is that Van Benthem van Bergh's analysis of the theory of common deterrence is not sufficiently rigorous. The second is that Van Benthem van den Bergh, as the champion of common deterrence, claims too much for it. I shall elaborate both points in the remainder of this review.

The logic of common deterrence is not so compelling as Van Benthem van den Bergh seems to think. The theory is based on the idea that a nuclear attack with a probability approaching certainty will elicit a counter-attack with nuclear weapons and, accordingly, will lead to the mutual destruction of defender and aggressor. But how certain is this probability? Is it really an 'inevitable fact of life' (p. 159)? The crucial assumption in the theory is that the leaders of the country that becomes the victim of a nuclear attack, prefer the outcome that both countries are destroyed to the outcome that they resign themselves to defeat. In other words, that they will act like envious individuals. If one does not accept this assumption – one can imagine that the leader who has to take this fatal decision will not always be capable of destroying the lives of tens of millions of people out of revenge – then it appears that the development of strategies on the basis of 'as if' assumptions ('as if' the escalation process can be stopped at some level below that of an all-out nuclear war), with which the cursed representatives of the old, prenuclear thinking occupy themselves, is not so devoid of reality as Van Benthem van den Bergh would like us to believe. He would undoubtedly object that this 'stability-instability' paradox is untenable, since a potential aggressor under no circumstance would be prepared to run the risk that an attack might provoke a disastrous counter-attack. This objection entails, however – and I apologize beforehand for having to be a bit formal – a violation of one of the properties of the so-called *Archimedean axiom*, which is presumed to hold with respect to choice under uncertainty. This property implies

that, in a situation with three possible outcomes – in this case: (*victory*), (*status quo*) and (*destruction*), where (*victory*) is (strictly) preferred to (*status quo*) and (*status quo*) to (*destruction*) – there exists a value between 0 and 1 for the probability  $\alpha$ , such that the individual will prefer the lottery  $\alpha(\text{victory}) + 1-\alpha(\text{destruction})$  to the (*status quo*). Now I realize perfectly well that this axiom has been criticized time and again, and until recently I certainly belonged to those who did so, but since David Kreps's defence of this axiom in his *A course in microeconomic theory*, I am no longer sure that a tradeoff would not be possible in the situation sketched above. Kreps writes:

Suppose  $p$  gives you \$100 for sure,  $q$  gives you \$10 for sure, and  $r$  consists of your death. You might then say that  $r$  is so much worse than  $q$  that no probability  $\alpha$  however close to one makes  $\alpha p + (1-\alpha)r$  better than  $q$ . But if you think so, think again. Imagine that you are told that you can have \$10 right now or, if you choose to drive to some nearby location, a check for \$100 is waiting for you. If you are like most people, you will probably get into your car to get the \$100. But this, to a minute degree, increases the chances of your death (1990 ed., p. 76).

Another argument advanced by Van Benthem van den Bergh in support of the theory of common deterrence is clearly borrowed from Immanuel Kant's *Zum Ewigen Frieden*. This argument also relates to decision-making under uncertainty. According to Van Benthem van den Bergh, the political leaders of states that find themselves in a situation of common deterrence, will not start a nuclear war, because they 'will not risk their own lives and those of their families and friends' (p. 265). This argument also appears to be very plausible at first sight, but is nevertheless not correct. World history is full of leaders who are prepared to risk their own life or the lives of their next of kin, in an attempt to achieve certain outcomes. Regardless whether they are princes with dynastic ambitions, such as Gustavus II Adolphus, who was killed in the battle of Lützen (1632), or liberal politicians, such as British Prime Minister Asquith. The fact that he had four sons, all of whom might volunteer for service in the British army (what all four of them would do in actual fact), did not keep Asquith from forcefully supporting Sir Edward Grey's point of view, in the Summer of 1914, that a German attack on France meant that Great Britain could no longer stand aside, and should intervene on the side of France. Or would Van Benthem van den Bergh wish to maintain that Gustavus II Adolphus and Asquith belong to the category of 'deranged or suicidal leaders' (p. 265)? The only kind of leaders of whom he is prepared to admit that they may not be deterred by assured destruction.

Not only does Van Benthem van den Bergh fail to elaborate the theory of common deterrence rigorously enough, he also fails to analyse its implications far enough. He discusses extensively the consequences of common deterrence in the context of a bipolar system, but he limits his discussion of common deterrence in the context of a multipolar system, without further justification, to

the conditions under which the present five nuclear powers may establish a nuclear regime. One of the major tasks of that regime would be to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. It seems to me, however, that, on the contrary, the logic of common deterrence implies that the nuclear regime should aim at realizing a situation in which every state (why not every citizen of the world?) would possess an invulnerable and dependable deterrent. However that may be, the events in former Yugoslavia show clearly what such a directorate of the five nuclear powers will come down to. The nuclear powers, together with their allies, may constitute a security community, but outside that area the elimination struggle between survival units goes on unabated.

My second general point of criticism is that, as I explained before, Van Benthem van den Bergh claims too much for the theory of common deterrence. It is true that in the introduction he still allows for the possibility that the 'long peace' is not the result of common deterrence alone, but later, when he describes the developments after Gorbachev's accession, such subtlety is wasted on him. 'Only the common deterrence perspective can make the development of stable expectations of peaceful conduct in Europe understandable' (p. 194). The same applies to the Russian withdrawal from Eastern Europe. 'Only the expectations of peaceful relations induced by common deterrence can explain the manner in which Gorbachev gave up (...) Soviet control over Eastern Europe' (p. 198). While further on he emphasizes yet again that the radical change in policy under Gorbachev has nothing to do with SDI, and that 'only common deterrence can explain this' (p. 240). Disregarding the problem that Van Benthem van den Bergh threatens to lapse into, what Waltz has called, a third image approach of international relations (the explanation of the behaviour of states and statesmen is to be found in the structure of the international system), one can readily think of many other explanations why the leaders of the Soviet Union were prepared to abandon the Eastern European glacis – for example from the perspective of a struggle for power between various factions within the Soviet Union.

Besides, there is a more general model available to analyse the behaviour of the United States and the Soviet Union. This is the duopoly model. With this model it is also possible to give a more 'natural' explanation of the phenomenon that the United States and the Soviet Union, in spite of the fact that both of them disposed of an invulnerable second strike capability, persisted in trying to outdo each other by developing more destructive and more sophisticated weapons. In this model it is not necessary to resort to 'atavistic' forces that, for one reason or the other, are not prepared to face reality. The 'nearly schizoid conduct' of the superpowers would then be interpreted as 'moves' in a bargaining process, which has the same characteristics as that between duopolists with respect to prices and market shares.

I cannot end this review without expressing my regret that the book must have been produced in great haste. The lay-out is badly done and the line intervals are a complete mess. Very annoying are also the countless errors in quotations, in spelling and in historical dates, as well as the references to publications

that do not figure in the bibliography. I wish Van Benthem van den Bergh every success with his book, but a second printing ought not to be published before someone has had the chance to proof-read the text.

R.H. Lieshout

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Wyger R.E. Velema, **Enlightenment and Conservatism in the Dutch Republic. The Political Thought of Elie Luzac (1721-1796)**. Van Gorcum, Assen/Maastricht 1993.

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De hoogleraar Nieuwe Geschiedenis aan de VU te Amsterdam, Prof. Dr. A. Th. van Deursen, wees er onlangs op dat halve kennis van de geschiedenis gevaarlijker is dan helemaal geen kennis. Met halve kennis worden vooroordelen en beoordelingsfouten in stand gehouden, met het ontbreken van kennis kan dat niet. De ondertoon van zijn sarcasme was echter dat gedegen historische kennis het beste is. Welnu, Velema's studie over Elie Luzac is een voorbeeld hoe zorgvuldig historisch onderzoek op halve kennis berustende stereotypen kan wegnemen. Het betreft hier het stereotype van de achttiende eeuw als conservatief-kleinburgerlijk. Na de onstuimige Gouden Eeuw met zijn hoog-ontwikkelde economie, schilderkunst, literatuur en wetenschap, volgde een eeuw met verval op alle fronten. Dat beeld is veel te simpel. Op de Gouden Eeuw valt genoeg af te dingen, zoals Van Deursen en anderen hebben aangetoond, terwijl de achttiende eeuw lang zo vervallen niet is als het algemene vooroordeel luidt. Velema maakt dit in zijn studie op overtuigende wijze duidelijk. Hij laat zien dat het beeld van achttiende-eeuws conservatisme als een reactionair alternatief voor de Verlichting niet klopt. De Verlichting bestaat niet. De Engelse en Schotse Verlichting droeg een totaal ander karakter dan de Franse of Duitse. Je had dan ook 'verlichte' conservatieven en 'onverlichte' revolutionairen. Burke bijvoorbeeld was een 'verlichte' conservatief die de Franse Revolutie zag als een uitbarsting van 'onverlicht' irrationeel geweld. Smalend zei dat de revolutie in Frankrijk verklaard kon worden als men bedacht dat in korte tijd een eeuw achterstand op Engeland moest worden ingehaald.

Zelfs onder historici bestond tot voor kort de opvatting dat de Verlichting vrijwel geheel aan Nederland was voorbijgegaan. Velema wijt deze beoordelingsfout aan de onjuiste identificatie van Verlichting met bepaalde vormen van filosofisch radicalisme in het achttiende-eeuwse Frankrijk. Pas als met deze voorstelling van zaken wordt gebroken, kan de historicus oog krijgen voor een Nederlandse Verlichting. Dat is een Protestantse Verlichting, dat wil zeggen: een Verlichting in de context van een Protestantse cultuur. In Frankrijk voltrok de Verlichting zich in een Katholieke cultuur en dat is een niet te verwaarlozen verschil geweest. In 1685 vond immers de opheffing van het Edict van Nantes plaats, waarmee Lodewijk XIV zijn land beroofde van de intellectuele elite die de Hugenoten vormden en hen verdreef naar landen als de Republiek, Engeland en Pruisen, waar ze niet alleen een gastvrij onthaal vonden, maar ook een