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**ARMAGEDDON: COMPARATIVE IMAGES OF THE NUCLEAR CONFLICT  
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION IN AMERICAN CINEMA<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* Film offers a valuable mirror to reflect on how we assess our present and past. The Cold War was one of the most troubled periods in history. Two huge, wealthy, energetic, and creative societies competed in all areas. During those decades of electric change and development they faced each other with weapons of ever increasing lethality. The film industry in both countries looked at how the nuclear exchange would impact in both lands. Over the decades as the weaponry changed, as the patterns of leadership changed, as the economy of the world evolved, both nations' film industry painted different images of what Armageddon could look like. If we compare comparable films, across similar decades, what do we learn of that era and those people? *Methods and Materials.* The methods used in the article are comparative, analytical and functional systematic ones. The materials used are the following: 1) five films of both cultures from different decades; 2) secondary accounts of contemporary events; 3) secondary reviews of the selected films, and 4) secondary accounts of parallel incidents. *Analysis.* With the complex weapons of the Cold War era we certainly need to worry about the technological imperative and the potential role of accident and unintended consequences. However, we are blessed that the doom day scenario has not yet erupted. We are most fortunate that the dire warning of many US filmmakers have not been realized. Indeed with the coming advent of AI technology and 5G communications, we may have more to fear than ever before. *Results.* After fifty some years of the Cold War, films continue to project the worst fears of people. As we review these films across the several decades we see constancy, the films again and again distrust technology.

**Key words:** Soviet-American relations, Cold war, nuclear conflict threat, American cinema, film propaganda.

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**АРМАГЕДДОН: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЕ ЯДЕРНОГО КОНФЛИКТА  
МЕЖДУ США И СССР В АМЕРИКАНСКОМ КИНО<sup>1</sup>**

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* Кинематограф представляет зеркальное отражение того, как народы и государства воспринимают свои взаимоотношения в прошлом и настоящем. Холодная война была одним из наиболее опасных моментов в мировой истории. Два огромных, богатых, динамичных и креативных государства соперничали и конкурировали во всех сферах. В течение этих напряженных десятилетий колоссальных технологических изменений оба государства не раз оказывались перед угрозой применения окончательного оружия, которое угрожало самому существованию всего человечества. Киноиндустрия в обеих странах демонстрировала, как ядерная гонка может отразиться на каждой из участников конфликта. По мере того как разрабатывались новые ядерные технологии, сменялась политическая элита и руководство в обеих странах, по мере того как изменялась мировая экономика в США и СССР, киноиндустрия и в СССР, и в США по-разному отражала понимание того, как мог бы выглядеть Армагеддон. Если мы проанализируем ключевые американские и советские фильмы, выпущенные в разные годы на протяжении десятилетий холодной войны, то сможем многое узнать об этой эпохе постоянной угрозы ядерного конфликта и о людях, находившихся в состоянии непрерывного страха. В предлагаемой статье рассматриваются наиболее заметные фильмы, созданные в США. Авторы намерены обратиться к анализу советской кинопродукции по данной теме в ближайшем будущем. *Методы и материалы.* В ходе исследования применяются историко-сравнительный метод, метод анализа и синтеза, а также системный подход. В статье использованы: 1) сценарии художественных фильмов, выпущенные в США в 1950–1990 гг.; 2) опубликованные источники, связанные с проблематикой холодной войны; 3) научная литература по проблемам идеологической конфронтации в период холодной войны; 4) хронологические обзоры параллельных инцидентов в области ядерных технологий и ядерного оружия. Т. Хид проанализировал общее направление развития темы возможности возникновения ядерного конфликта между США и СССР, произвел выборку и анализ основных фильмов для иллюстрации и анализа инструментария формирования концепции взаимной ответственности обеих стран. А.И. Кубышкин проанализировал взаимосвязь содержания кинопродукции США с реальными историческими факторами и событиями периода холодной войны, рассмотрел динамику изменения идеологической парадигмы ввиду развития процесса политической коммуникации и осознания взаимной ответственности за судьбы мира, выразившиеся как в изменении позиций правящих политических кругов США и СССР, так и появлении новых акцентов в художественном творчестве американских кинематографистов.

**Ключевые слова:** советско-американские отношения, холодная война, угроза ядерного конфликта, американский кинематограф, кинопропаганда.

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**Introduction**

Film offers a valuable mirror to reflect on how we assess our present and past. The Cold War was one of the most troubled periods in history. Two huge, wealthy, energetic, and creative societies competed in all areas. During those decades of electric change and development, they faced each other with weapons of ever-increasing lethality. The film industry in both countries looked at how the nuclear exchange would impact in both lands. Over the decades as the weaponry changed, as the patterns of leadership changed, as the economy of the world evolved, both nations' film industry painted different images of what Armageddon could look like. If we compare

comparable films, across similar decades, what do we learn of that era and those people?

**Analysis**

**On the Beach** Director Stanley Kramer, Lomitas Productions, Inc. (1959).

After a nuclear war killed all human life in the northern hemisphere a US submarine, USS Sawfish, sailed into Australian waters and docked in the last nation still sustaining human life. The American sailors and the Australian citizens all knew they had only, at best, a few years before they too would succumb to the radiation illness. The entire planet would soon be devoid of human existence.

As one of the earliest films about nuclear exchanges, the film gave the viewer few details of how the war began or how it developed over time. It vaguely implied it was both the result of mistakes and technological failures. The film, while made in 1959, was set in 1964.

How does this tale relate to the history we know of 1964 and the military technology in place at that time? Neville Shute wrote the novel that lays the basis for the movie in 1957, and Stanley Kramer shot the film in 1959. So what did they know of the late 1950s and how well did they predict the world of 1964?

While both the US and the USSR had nuclear arms in the thousands by 1964, the ICBM that would forever change the equation of nuclear terror was not yet in massive deployment [14, p. 77]. That missile linked to thermonuclear warheads was the weapon that posed the first real threat of global annihilation. The Soviet Union did not yet explode their Tsar Bomba until 1961 [2]. By late 1950 both nations relied upon strategic bombers for the bulk of the nuclear threat and some intermediate missile of limited range and accuracy. While an exchange of these weapons would do massive damage a nuclear winter was not a common fear of military planners.

However, in 1962, we did experience the Cuban missile crisis, the closest the world ever came to nuclear war, and neither of the scenarios Neville Shute forecast came to pass. When Chairman Khrushchev stationed nuclear-armed IRBM (Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile) and MRBM (Medium Range Ballistic Missile) in Cuba both President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev were able to negotiate a de-escalation of the crisis and resolved the issues without a nuclear exchange [1; 8].

With the sophisticated weapons of that era, we certainly need to worry about the technological imperative and the potential role of accident and unintended consequences. However, we are blessed that the doom day scenario has not yet erupted. We are most fortunate that the dire warning of both Neville Shute and Stanley Kramer have not been realized. Indeed with the coming advent of AI technology and 5G communications, we may have more to fear than ever before [10].

**Fail Safe** Director, Sydney Lumet, Columbia Pictures (1964).

*Fail Safe* is another nuclear terror movie that shocks with its surprise ending posited to maintain world peace.

Again, technology is the 'bête noire' of the story. An American Air Force squadron is flying a routine training mission when maintenance repair excites a false signal to a bomber squadron to proceed to target: Moscow. The title, *Fail Safe*, refers to a security procedure that had US bombers fly to a designated rendezvous point where they would orbit until they received an affirmative, secure, coded order to attack their assigned target. The routine change of a communication module transmitted a faulty signal to proceed to target. The one bomber squadron that received that confirmed attack order flew past their fail safe point and entered Soviet air space.

Utilizing the US-USSR Hotline, a result of the Cuban missile crisis, the President of the US phoned the leader of the USSR. The US President and Chairman Khrushchev spoke. While they talked, both could see that Soviet aircraft could only neutralize a few of the attacking planes. Likewise, Soviet anti-aircraft missile attacks were not effective. From the conversation, it was clear that the Soviet Union was preparing to launch their forces on a retaliatory strike. In a surprising development, the US President ordered the US Air Force to assist Soviet Forces in their attack on the US B-52's. Enraged US officers were shocked at the order, and some refused to execute the command. Again all the US aircraft were not shot down.

When US officials were shocked they could no longer communicate with their aircraft the President asked Khrushchev if the Soviet were blocking their communications; after confusion and apparent conflict on the Soviet side, Khrushchev admitted they had broken US code and were able to block communications. The US President requested that they halt the communications blackout.

However, even when the blocking sources were silenced the remaining bombers, following their standard orders, refused to accept oral commands to scrub their mission. Also, when a crew member's wife went online to plead with her husband, they continued toward targets.

In a stunning move to protect world peace and avoid Armageddon, the US President ordered an American bomber to load their weapons and fly to New York City at the same time as the US crews neared Moscow. With both the Soviet Ambassador to the UN online and the US

ambassador to the USSR, in Moscow, online the President ordered the US aircraft over New York City to drop his weapons on hearing that Moscow had been destroyed. The assumption was that with mutual destructions, the casualties would be limited to both population centers and a total nuclear exchange would be deterred.

This film was released after the most frightening event of the Cold War. During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 the world stood on the precipice of nuclear Armageddon and it just barely survived. This film stunned filmgoers because they had just recently seen the world closer than ever to nuclear winter.

How does the technology of 1964 compare to today's machinery? First, there is no fail safe point, no delay for human reflection. With ICBMs today once the button is pushed the missiles launch and in 30 minutes, or so, they arrive on target. Just as all the anti-aircraft technology, planes, and missiles, could not stop all the planes of 1964 we could likewise assume that regardless the billions spent on antimissile systems, some missiles will reach target. The speed of today's missiles makes the promise of a fail safe point quaint.

Perhaps what is more astonishing is that we have had so few nuclear accidents; Broken Arrow is a US term for a lost nuclear weapon or an accident with a nuclear weapon. By 2013 the US reported thirty-two "Broken Arrows" incidents and yet not one of these has resulted in a nuclear explosion [8]. We can only hope that history today continue to record technology more successful than fiction writers and filmmakers imagine.

The role of an accident is always a vital component of the story of history. It is impossible to think about the technology of weaponry today without fearing the many possibilities for accident or mistake. However, the story is one of incredible luck in looking at history in this regard. Perhaps the period of the greatest threat to the world for nuclear exchange was the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. During that time Khrushchev placed medium-range ballistic missiles and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba. In response, Pres. Kennedy ordered the US Navy to quarantine the island of Cuba. In response to this Khrushchev ordered Soviet attack submarines to sail to the island in the protection of the freighter ships that were carrying the military weaponry to Castro's assistance.

The response of the US Navy was to track those Soviet submarines, to identify them, and to do all that was necessary to neutralize them. That did not mean to attack the submarines but rather to keep them submerged, keeping US warships on top of them so they would be unable to surface and recharge their batteries.

The conditions for the Soviet submariners in such an instance were severe. The Soviet subs were not used to the impact of tropical waters, and unbearable interior temperatures resulted in ships not prepared for such conditions. The crew's situation was horrendous. One of the Soviet submarine Captain's, Valentin Savitsky, snapped under the pressure and ordered his men to load the special weapon torpedo (a nuclear warhead) and launch it against the American naval forces above them, particularly the aircraft carrier in their sights. It was only pure accident that placed on that ship the Flotilla Commander, Vasili Arkhipov [3]. He was in charge of the four submarine flotilla. In 1961 he was an officer on K-19; a Soviet sub that lost the coolant for its nuclear reactor, and most of the men died of radiation sickness as they struggled to avert a nuclear melt-down. He alone understood what the horror of a nuclear accident would do. He countermanded the ship's Captain and ordered them to stand down from an attack. It was a pure accident that put him on that ship, at that time.

Without a doubt, if the Soviets had launched nuclear weapons against American naval forces, it would have excited a full nuclear retaliatory attack by the US against the Soviet Union. So history has been good to us in blocking against the horror of nuclear warfare. While numerous incidents occurred on both side, some extremely dangerous, our control systems have held to date.

**The Day After** Director, Nicholas Meyer, ABC Circle Films (1983 TV movie).

*The Day After* portrayed a full nuclear exchange as seen from the American heartland: Kansas City, Missouri, and Lawrence, Kansas. It has a special power set in the iconic, pastoral scene of Middle America. Peaceful farmlands, families engaged in activities of everyday life, couples lost in romantic interludes, all bely an impending horror. As the scene shifts from farm families at lunch, to hospital wards, to families in their cars, we hear a cacophony of news bulletins darkening the peaceful skies.

Again with Berlin as the epicenter, East-West tensions escalated by the hour as violent engagements

roll across Germany. Combat troops coursed across former borders. (The film meticulously avoided blaming one side or the other for instituting the first strike.) Eventually, tactical nuclear weapons were released on the battlefield, and that quickly escalated into a full nuclear exchange. Kansas City was portrayed as central casting for observing the US retaliatory response. Offutt Airbase, a B-52 base, is only 190 miles north of Kansas City and Kansas Citians watched the massive bomber fly over on their mission to the USSR.

The most riveting scenes evolved as Minutemen missiles thundered from the many silos situated across the farm fields. The exquisite contrast between the bucolic fields of grain and the terror weapons of the nuclear age across limpid blue skies burns into the viewer's memory.

The first blast, a high burst of an EMP (nuclear, electronic energy pulse), disabled all electronics, and electrical engines. All vehicles froze where they stood. Numerous ground or low altitude nuclear explosions followed. Kansas City was leveled, and radiation turned the verdant fields ashen gray and radioactive dust lingered on all that survived in the open.

The rest of the film dealt with the death of societal norms and the individuals battling to recreate some fraction of society. The scenes of nuclear devastation are hard to watch, harder to contemplate as a real possibility. President Reagan, always the optimist, could not sleep after watching this film. His comments on nuclear war changed after his viewing.

However, again, how does this relate to the realities of the time? During the early 1980s under Reagan's administration, we tested the Soviets as never before with squadrons of B-52s charging the Soviet border and only turning after driving the Soviets to disclose all their defensive capabilities. Even the US Navy sent ships ever closer to the Soviet shoreline. Reagan's vastly increased military budget threatened the Soviet economy as never before. The Strategic Defense Initiative, (Star Wars) forced the Soviets to explode their Defense budget and again delay any relief to the Soviet consumer.

We all knew of the Cuban missile crisis and the narrow avoidance of nuclear Armageddon at that time. However, few know how close we came to a full-scale nuclear exchange during Operation Able Archer 83.

In 1983 NATO held its most massive maneuver yet and marshaled forces as never before including a mock call up of DEFCON One [2]. The Soviet leadership heard of the NATO activities from their intelligence services, and the Soviet leader, Andropov, believing the harsh rhetoric Reagan used in so many of his public statements, prepared orders for a surprise nuclear first strike. It was only, after others in Soviet leadership cautioned a more careful consideration did Soviet forces stand down [5].

Again, while the incident came close to exciting the call to war, other, controlling factors calmed the waters.

**World War III** Director Robert Stone, ZDF (1998).

We have never been fans of counterfactual history, and this movie does not give us pause to change our opinion.

*World War III*, posits that the Soviet coup of 1991 that detained Chairman Gorbachev succeeded and Soviet party hardliners took control of the Soviet Union. This film was originally a German production, but another edition was released as an English edition: we observed the English edition.

A variation on the Armageddon films that populated the film theaters during the Cold War, *World War III*, is perhaps one of the least successful. It opens with a thermonuclear exchange that destroys humanity.

After showing M. Gorbachev visiting East Berlin on its 40th anniversary, October 1989, Gorbachev returns to Moscow and a Party coup. He disappears never to surface again, and party hardliners seize control over the Soviet Union. (The actual coup attempt took place in August 1991.) The hardliners, as a first action, used Chinese tactics as seen in Tiananmen Square, and brutally put down the demonstrators in East Germany.

NATO responded by rushing reinforcements to West Berlin. After a political assassination of a Gorbachev sympathizer, after theater military leaders threatened military assaults, the Soviet Union sorted its submarine forces into the Atlantic and launched their strategic bomber forces to challenge western borderlands. In support, East Germany announced a new blockade of Berlin and warned that any NATO planes would be destroyed if they attempted to relieve the blockade.

In response, the US mounted a large naval convoy to rush massive reinforcements to NATO. Soshkin, the mythical Soviet leader that took over from Gorbachev, announced a blockade of Europe and ordered the Baltic Fleet to interdict the NATO convoy. The convoy, after suffering significant casualties, landed in Europe.

Soshkin ordered Warsaw Pact forces to invade Germany's northern Baltic coast. The NATO forces rushed north to defend Germany's coast. When those forces moved from the Fulda gap region, Warsaw forces attacked and drove NATO forces back.

NATO tactical air forces rallied and devastated Warsaw military and drove WARSAW forces back into German, capturing Berlin, and drove for the Polish border. Soshkin, fearful NATO would enter Soviet territory ordered a nuclear, demonstration explosion over the North Sea. The US went to full nuclear alert and after a Soviet radar station suffered a malfunction and reported a massive attack from the US Soshkin launched of all his strategic missiles. The US detected those launches and released its arsenal of strategic weapons. Nuclear winter arrived on the northern hemisphere. This movie purports to be factual until the coup and then offer its' counterfactual account after the coup succeeds. The film's producers also reported they had multiple military advisors on the set and reviewing the script. Regardless, the film selectively ignored many events that occurred before August 1991.

For instance, the Berlin wall fell in November 1989, and by December all communist leaders were gone in East Germany. However, so much of the early end days of the Cold war were ignored. In December 1988, M. Gorbachev delivered a famous speech at the UN where he announced massive reductions in the Soviet military: 500,000 men dismissed from the military, many divisions withdrawn from WARSAW pact nations and dissolved, and considerable reductions in all Soviet offensive weapons in WARSAW pact nations [6, p. 459]. By the time the movie talks of WARSAW forces advancing, there were no WARSAW forces. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Bulgaria even Romania removed communist governments. In 1990 USSR promised to withdraw all Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia and Hungary [11].

At the time of the film's account, there were no Soviet forces ready to attack NATO, indeed

in August 1990, the Soviet Union agreed to let unified Germany joined NATO.

Even if you accepted the film's premise that none of those Cold War events occurred even the tale left makes no sense. Of these historical events that occurred, it is ludicrous to say that the Soviet Baltic fleet could blockade Europe from a US naval convoy. The Soviet Baltic fleet was hardly a blue water navy. At best it was an assemblage of destroyers and frigates, albeit with a strong submarine contingent. In 1990 the United Kingdom alone had three carriers and forty-eight large surface combatants [12]. More than enough ships to neutralize any Soviet naval surge. Also, land-based aircraft, many NATO bases, would have decimated any Soviet surface fleet with no air protection.

When M. Gorbachev took office in March-April 1985, he learned stunningly that the Soviet economy was but a hollow shell [6, p. 459]. He knew that he had to decrease military expenditures; they were bankrupting the nation. None of this was taken into account in this film. This entire film is counterfactual.

**Thirteen Days** Director Roger Donaldson, Beacon Pictures (2000).

*Thirteen Days* portrayed the most dangerous days of the Cold War. The film is unusual; it uses an actual tape recording of crucial meetings of White House staff as the script, a most unusual perspective.

This film, the 2000 year account of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, is a different take on the Armageddon films we have looked at so far. This one happened; the world was on the raw cusp of thermonuclear war. In summer 1962 Chairman Khrushchev was on the Black Sea coast with Marshall Malinowski, the leader of the Soviet military, he pointed out to Khrushchev that just over the horizon lay Turkey and US nuclear missiles. They could land on Moscow in fifteen minutes or less. Khrushchev wanted to know why the USSR could not match the US strategic advantage such missiles placement provided: so started Operation Anadyr.

To counter the US advantage with its forward placement of MRBM (medium-range ballistic missiles) in Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom, Khrushchev proposed placing Soviet missiles, both MRBM and IRBM (Intermediate-range ballistic missile) in Cuba so they could also

threaten the US population centers in sparse minutes [4, p. 171]. In 1962 the US had a healthy lead in ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles), and while they could reach Soviet targets from bases in the US, the Soviets could not yet match that range [14, p. 77].

To counter that US advantage Khrushchev ordered a vast military build-up on the Caribbean island with the latest in weaponry: aircraft, anti-air missiles, a range of tactical nuclear missiles, four regiments of elite Soviet armored troops, and many nuclear-armed patrol boats. It was an incredibly bold and daring adventure he ordered. He assumed they could land and deploy all the armaments under utmost secrecy and only reveal them to the American public when they were all operational. It would, in one stroke, shift the correlation of strategic power.

However, Khrushchev was again naive. His supplies began arriving in Cuba as early as July 1962 and US intelligence quickly discovered the moment.

Thirteen Days look at this crisis day by day from the moment President Kennedy was shown the U-2 photos of the missile sites. Tuesday, October 16; the CIA shows President Kennedy the U-2 photos of the missile bases being installed. The Soviets were indeed installing offensive strategic missiles in Cuba. When they first saw the evidence, they could not believe that the Soviets can be so foolhardy. The US leaders assumed that Khrushchev would know that the US would not tolerate such an escalation of the arms race.

The movie portrays each day of the crisis: thirteen days of nuclear terror. October 16 they saw Soviet MRBM and knew the entire US southeast was in the range of the Soviet warheads. October 17; the President formed an Executive Committee, EXCOM, to manage the crisis and they were told that they that IRBM had now been photographed on the ground in Cuba.

The confirmation of the intermediate-range ballistic missiles changed the threat profile. It meant that now the entire US strategic missile forces were in the range of the Soviet rockets. Only the extreme northwest, the Seattle region, was out of range of the Soviet missiles. Now Cuba was being crisscrossed by reconnaissance aircraft daily.

On October 19; on the fourth day of the crisis, the decision was made to “quarantine” the island. It was a blockade, but to use that term

was to declare war: blockades, by international law, were only allowed as an act of war. The next day the quarantine went into effect. On Monday, October 22, Kennedy spoke to the nation and told them of the situation and announced the quarantine of the island. Khrushchev, on hearing of this speech, was furious that their elaborate scheme to sneak strategic missiles into Cuba was discovered. He now railed at his military advisers. As was often the case with Khrushchev, he had no plan B.

Soon the US and USSR established backdoor communications. A KGB agent contacted a friendly news commentator and told him that the Soviet Union would like to talk. Robert Kennedy soon set up secret meetings with the Soviet ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin. Shortly after those talks were underway, they found a proposal that will relieve the crisis: the US would pledge not to invade Cuba and to within six months withdraw the Jupiter missiles from Turkey. The Soviet Union would withdraw all its military forces and equipment from Cuba.

While the negotiations proceeded, there was still high drama at sea. As the first Soviet ships approached the line of quarantine, no one knew what would happen. With so many actors, with so many weapons cocked and on the highest alert, anything could go wrong. There was tremendous jubilation when Soviet ships began to stop and or turnaround.

Khrushchev was forced to back down from this extraordinary, bold initiative publicly. Soon after this event, the party leaders in the Politburo would move against Khrushchev only this time they would be successful. As an Armageddon film, this is an unusual one in that war did not result. In the tale, we came very close to nuclear exchange but cool heads, lucidity prevailed in the crisis. However, if we look at the technology of today, the weaponry of today, we have to worry.

It was months before the President got definitive word of the Soviet initiative. After seeing the U-2 photos, it was days before Kennedy's EXCOM committee decided on a course of action: quarantine. It was days before he could marshal US forces and address the nation. What of today's crisis management systems and the weapon technology of today? [13] Some weapons, laser weapons, will flash at the speed of light. How could we possibly have cool, reflective meetings

to consider decision options under such threats? How could any rational process consider possible alternatives or unintended consequences under such a time frame? With the lethality of today's weapons, how do we assess contending response's?

Do we now have weapons of such sophistication that we have no possible mechanisms to assess the risk and plot the appropriate response? With the perfusion of AI technology today, many would call for empowering the computer with the decision to call for the launching of lethal weapons. However, that will only terrify many who have grave doubts about the "wisdom" of automated decision algorithms [5]. Will we spend as much time developing mechanisms of decision-making in light of these new machines as we can spend on developing the technology war?

### Results

After fifty-some years of the Cold War, films continue to project the worst fears of people. As we review these films across the several decades we see constancy; the films, again and again, distrust technology. They worry about the veniality of man and assume errors will occur. They offer a constant litany of heroic, brave men. (Few women appear as significant figures in these films.) However, as the war tools mutate and evolve the films seem unable to deal with the ever-increasing lethality of today's war and those we can image in our near future.

### Conclusions

After a review of these films one can be pessimistic as well as optimistic. While they constantly depict nuclear explosions and the incineration of millions, while they repeatedly record the failure of technology, and while they continually portray humans crashing under the inhuman loads the balance of power requires, we did, we do survive.

Lightly covered in the films reviewed is the ever-increasing lethality of contemporary weapons. In World War II it would take a squadron of bombers and hundreds of bombs to destroy one bridge. Now one bomber could carry eight smart bombs and destroy eight different bridges. Instead of carpet bombing a city they can target individual buildings. The attack can even be

launched from a stand-off position well out of the range of defensive weapons. Often the defender may not even know they are under attack until the weapons ignite.

Drones or pilotless aircraft are one of the latest threats. In 2019 Saudi Arabia's major refinery was savaged by a dozen or more drones. AI (artificial intelligence) no doubt, enabled them to skillfully fly around Saudi defenses and strike the complex at its most critical locations and wreak massive damage. This method of attack can be done with very slight cost to the attacker. It is a new, massive threat: asymmetrical warfare [9].

Iran could launch a swarm attack with drones, air or sea, against US forces in the Persian Gulf for a slight expense but it would be extremely expensive for the US to provide adequate defenses against such an assault [8]. It is the latest version of David and Goliath.

All the films we reviewed here spoke to the latest in new threats to peace but the evolution never stops.

Yet, with all the weaponry, all the trillions, spent on engines of war we have not yet seen the mushroom cloud so fantasized in media.

### NOTE

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