

New Zealand After Nuclear War

THE BACKGROUND PAPERS

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the full scope of the likely nuclear impacts have been described. A few core elements can be recognized however. Unlike the production of the "War Book", any planning should be carried out publicly. This would ensure the necessary public understanding, co-operation and acceptance essential to its success. A public better informed on the implications for New Zealand of nuclear war would be an important objective. The objectives would be more wide-ranging than the production of instruction manuals. They should include continually updated strategies for dealing with the immediate crisis after nuclear war and approaches for responding to the longer-term problems that would follow, in the light of changing circumstances, information and technology.

It is important to recognise that the pressures facing a government after nuclear war would be broader than attempting to restore conditions to a semblance of the pre-war *status quo*. An event without precedent, such as nuclear war, may necessitate a fundamental questioning and change in the relationships between government and the people.

An exploration of such changes is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead three different models are presented of how government, by itself, might respond, and the possible consequences. The objectives are three-fold. First, to emphasise that how government responds would be an important, perhaps a central element in post-nuclear war recovery. Second, that the range of possible outcomes is diverse. Third, that government responses would be affected by many other developments over which it may have little control. These are not therefore intended to be predictive models.

An initial response is outlined below which is common to all models. It covers the first immediate reactions government might take on learning a major nuclear war has occurred.

It assumes that nuclear war takes place soon with little effective preparation even if it followed a period of rising international tension.

Initial response of government on "Day One"

1. Cabinet meets immediately.
2. It either proclaims a national emergency under existing legislation or summons Parliament to pass emergency legislation (or both).
3. The Prime Minister uses television and radio to give assurances of the continuity of government, undertakes to follow a policy of openness in regard to information, appeals for calm and respect for law and order, and requests co-operation of local authorities and industry.

(The assurance from government might not be possible if communication systems were disrupted by an EMP. The lack of information would seriously compound the other problems following an EMP - widespread failure of the electricity grid, destruction of computer systems, likely paralysis of financial institutions. People would attempt to check the accuracy of any public assurances; distrust and rumour may influence their reactions.)

4. Government would be under pressure for prompt decisions on the deployment of police and military personnel, control of international travel, implementation of rationing of petrol, food and other essential supplies, support of currency and transactions, control of

prices, assessment of national vulnerabilities and the implementation of a "stock-take" of strategic resources and equipment.

Given the present lack of preparedness these decisions would be difficult to resolve, let alone implement, and probably impossible if there was widespread overloading or prolonged collapse of communications.

Model 1: panic and breakdown

Perceiving widespread social breakdown as imminent the government resorts to giving extensive powers to the military and police under special legislation. This action and the method of its implementation is perceived as coercive and against people's self-interest. It thus accelerates the process of social breakdown it was intended to prevent.

There is widespread public unwillingness to accept the repressive measures on rationing, directed employment and restrictions on movement. This leads to further social disruption and unrest, undermining the remaining authority of government.

With government credibility gone and widespread social breakdown, a coup is attempted. Regions splinter into small selfish factions dominated by local interests and self-preservation. The engineering and maintenance staff required to keep communications, electricity and gas supplies operating lose their effectiveness as management and co-ordination breaks down. Without these inputs large cities become ungovernable.

Model 2: a centralised repressive response

In this model it is assumed that there is no major social breakdown in the short-term after nuclear war. There is no EMP effect and energy systems are not affected in the initial period. In the drive to sustain an economy which is forced to be largely self-contained, government moves swiftly to take control of the financial sector, suspends normal legal process, sets up a command economy, and conscripts large numbers of people into para-military roles to oversee and implement rationing and directed employment. Control is exercised from the centre with no allowance for regional autonomy. Social unrest is met with further repressive measures which are felt necessary.

The steady decline in health and increasing failure of machinery and essential services over the first 2 years increases the authoritarian response. Rigidity and central control, coupled with the steady erosion of democratic systems, are the dominant features of New Zealand society a few years after nuclear war.

Model 3: a flexible regional response

As in Model 2 there are no major disruptions in the initial post-war phase. However the uncertainty, fear and disruptions felt in city and country are not met by repressive authoritarianism. Despite the importance of "maintaining the familiar", people and government recognise that a period of profound change and adaptation lies ahead. New systems must be responsive to local needs and should avoid premature stagnation.