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'Nuclear winter' could bring years of failed crops

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"Nuclear winter" - the phrase sounds like a relic from the cold war, but the threat is far from over.

Even as the US and Russia have destroyed thousands of warheads in the name of disarmament, India, Pakistan and North Korea have swelled their stockpiles. A regional nuclear conflict would lower global temperatures for a decade, according to Alan Robock of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

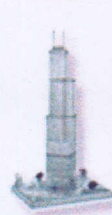
His team used a climate model shared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to calculate the effects of exploding 100 Hiroshima-sized bombs over major cities - roughly equivalent to an all-out nuclear war between India and Pakistan (*Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, vol 7, p 2003).

They found that the blasts would loft up to 5 million tonnes of black carbon soot into the atmosphere, lowering global temperatures by 1.4 °C. Growing seasons in the middle latitudes would be shortened and in some cases fail entirely. "By explaining the consequences to the world, we hope nothing like this will ever happen," says Robock.

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