

# Can we learn to live without the bomb?

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Ten years after the so-called end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons are still with us. There is the BMD, the risk of diversion of fissile materials, the fear of nuclearisation of terrorism. The weapons and their means of delivery have become ever more sophisticated. Through base systems, submarines, aircraft carriers, the global reach of militarism has intensified. Still, in proportion to the increasing threat all this represents to humankind's survival as well as to democracy and global development, public debate *with* visions of a nuclear-free is desperately feeble.

Advocates of a nuclear-free world, face immensely powerful governments and military-industrial-scientific structures. We also face the arrogance of power of the roughly 600 individuals (presidents, prime ministers, defence ministers, chiefs of staffs and commanders) who operate the global nuclear system, over and above the heads of 6 billion people on Earth. There has never been a referendum on whether or not citizens wanted to be 'secured' or 'defended' by nuclear weapons. Indeed, one could advance the hypothesis that nuclear weapons would be abolished if true national and global democracy were a reality. But advocates of nuclear freedom must also do some soul-searching and ask: have we chosen the most effective strategies and tactics in our work for nuclear disarmament? My answer is a definite 'no'!

The, perhaps provocative, thesis of this analysis is that we have:

- a) underestimated the human, psychological, existential and cultural-cosmological aspects of the nuclear age;
- b) we have worked far too much against the nuclear weapons as such (technical-material criticism) compared to working out visions of a better nuclear-free and peaceful world (existential, philosophical constructivism).

## **Existential aspects - or: what is so attractive about nuclear weapons?**

While most people abhor nuclear weapons and war, they also, consciously or un-consciously, embrace them as something good. Many have infused *positive values into the very existence of the Bomb*. It carries a secret as to how it will "act" the day it is used and few have ever seen a nuclear weapon. It is mystical and belongs to a teasingly exciting but closed society and is said to have magic powers. While it is a threat to all, it also carries the hope of our salvation; we can hope to obtain "security" from an evil enemy who, if he tries to kill us, will be killed himself.

By infusing the bomb with *godlike imagery* and integrating it in what is a consistent belief system bordering on deep religiosity, people can play God themselves, become the Destroyer and the Maker, create an eternal future or punish - themselves and/or others. What Robert Jay Lifton calls the "passionate embrace of nuclear weapons as a solution to death anxiety and a way of restoring a lost sense of immortality" could be, I believe, one of the least thought of explanations of the fascination held by many vis-a-vis the omnipotent Bomb.

Another dimension is that of *individual versus collective death*. The imagery of mass-destructive weapons is filled with allusions to death and dying. The search for the smallest unit of life led to the atom, the splitting of which is also the key to utter destruction. Could one argue that nuclear mass death is more attractive or more acceptable than individual, natural death? If it is true, as Tom Lehrer sang in the early 1960s, that in a nuclear war "we'll all go together when we go, every Hottentot and every Eskimo" - then, one may hypothesise, our individual death becomes somewhat easier to think of and live with. The individual is relieved of the pain and fear in meeting death alone and can imagine that he/she will meet loved ones "on the other side."

Closely related to this is the whole question of *suicide* - the so-called balance of (nuclear) terror and nuclear war often being compared to suicide: if we start we will get killed ourselves. *If* there are *any* signs to the effect that our present global civilisation and our times are suicidal, it is the first time in human history that we *are* also able to carry out the decision to exterminate ourselves and a considerable part, if not all, of Creation.

If we want to rid the world of nuclear weapons, we have to address these deep-seated existential issues, get them on the table, dialogue about them and overcome them as obstacles to change. It will not help us to focus on and attack the weapons or the nuclear managers, as is done in demonstrations, petitions, disarmament and arms control negotiations.

In front of us, thus, lies a huge existential, educational and soul-searching task that can only be approached through small-group and global dialogue and research: *what are the positive aspects of nuclear weapons that have, for fifty years, prevented people world wide from rising against them as the utter madness they de facto represent?*

## **Culture, cosmology and ethics**

Except for the Chinese, Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons, all are *Christian nukes*. They are *the inventions and products of a Western or Occidental 'social grammar'* as well as the West's superior technology and science. Nuclear weapons can be seen as isomorphic with pyramidal or feudal structures of society and are managed by an all-powerful elite that seeks to dominate other peoples, other cultures and Nature. Male science came across the atom when trying to deprive Mother

Nature of her secrets. Their function is conceived within a short time perspective - Big Bangs delivered within a few minutes over thousands of kilometres, a quick ending of a war or of all of civilisation. They are the embodiment of the power of science and technology over ethics and spirituality.

They are *isomorphic with a mono-theistic belief system*. Presumably, the user of nuclear weapons is completely convinced that there is only one truth, that he possesses that truth and that he has 'God on our side.' In a culture based on poly-theism and on the belief that there can be more than one single truth, like e.g. Gandhianism and Buddhism, nuclear weapons and their use seem more difficult to explain and justify. Further, nuclear weapons are deeply anthropocentric; they are extended powers of Man, the Man that is the centre of everything, which means that there is nothing sacred and nothing above Man. Since the test in Alamogordo, code-named Trinity, an ever more secularised, technocratic and God-forgetting Occident took upon it to play God. Never before had Man been able to even think of the decision of whether or not to let Humanity live. Hitherto, that had belonged exclusively to the authority of God. Since 1945 Man competes with God about being the Almighty. And we are reminded of Robert Oppenheimer's "I am become Death, the shatterer of the world" as well as Einstein's famous dictum that everything then changed except our ways of thinking.

In terms of ethics one might say that *Kant's categorical imperative became outdated as a global rule*. Philosopher Hans Jonas, for instance, rightly points out that the ever open question of what humans are or ought to be is now less important compared to the "first commandment tacitly underlying it, but never before in need of enunciation: That they should be - indeed as human beings." We need, he says, to expand Kant and observe a rule that he formulates in this manner: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life." That is, with the advent of nuclearism, we need to stress that there should be *something rather than nothing* and that we and the world will hardly survive in the long run without an ethics of global responsibility. The fundamentally new ethical claim is that we are responsible for preserving the Earth *precisely because* we can destroy it, and that was not a relevant issue before 1945.

There are at least other essential aspects on the Bomb as expressive of Western cosmology. It is *a deeply male-dominated* technology and civilisation. The war system and the military-industrial system is the extreme expression of it; the Bomb has virtually no female aspects such as nurturing, mutuality, permanence of humanity, non-contractual obligations, cultivation of Nature, respect or care for future generations. Indeed, it is the negation of all that.

Secondly, it seems *the West cannot live without enemies*. If you do not have them, you construct them. Most security experts and politicians seem to depart from the utterly misguided assumption that, first, there is an objective threat assessment done and then military defence and security policies are developed to meet them and reduce their potential impact. The whole system operates the other way around as can be seen in the reaction by the West to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact: the war-preparing system continues virtually unchanged while images of threats and favourite enemies are produced through a kind of assembly line.

Third, the *Western obsession with enemies* points in the direction of an inner weakness bordering on paranoia. The more wealth one owns, the more power and privileges one has in an ever more unequal world, the more there is to fear to lose. Thus, others more easily come to look like envious, greedy and threatening - be it refugees, asylum-seekers, terrorists or 'rogue' states. All dangers have

to be fought. There is a potential terrorist or bomber lurking around every corner - and thus we have the pathological, autistic system of *self-created* threats producing ever more sophisticated weapons and using more and more scarce resources irrespective of what reality actually looks like. The weapons are put to use to legitimate and justify the power system and thereby creating more future enemies, e.g. people who hate the West; in short, the new Bin Ladens.

To summarise, if we want to rid the world of nuclear weapons:

1) *Western cosmology (or civilisation, culture) must be addressed as deeply determining* for the development of nuclearism. We all need a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and deep-rooted assumptions that make nuclear weapons look natural and legitimate (at least to those who have them).

2) *Secondly, it will be necessary to open up Western culture to other cultural influences* that are, in and of themselves, less conducive to nuclearism, be it Gandhian, Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist or other kinds of thinking. Particularly after September 11, 2001, we should try to strengthen the 'soft' peace-promoting aspects of all religions and the dialogue among them. World unity in diversity, not uniformity, is desirable. The very existence of nuclear weapons is a gross negation of diversity.

3) Further, there is a need to *discuss and develop a set of truly global ethical norms that are not based on the local neighbourhood ethics* we are used to running. So far globalisation has been military and economic, while cultural, ethical and political globalisation is lagging ever more behind. Western citizens and their governments have to develop less anthropocentric worldviews and become more humble and caring about the future for all humanity because we have so much technological power, as some would say more than the human race is mature enough to handle.

4) To rid the world of nuclear and other weapons, we *have to attack the self-created, pathological enemy images and threat assessments*. There is a great need to actualise, in pedagogical manners, the huge arsenals of non-violent conflict-resolution and the values of mutuality, co-existence, unity in diversity, tolerance, reconciliation and forgiveness - to make the soft power stronger and make the hard power weaker. The next step is *to present the alternatives to decision-makers* saying something like, "if you pursue these different policies based on these different norms and concepts you are likely to create fewer enemies and win more friends in the future - in short, be more safe." (Some examples follow).

5) Finally, to learn to live without the bomb, we need a *better balance between male and female thinking and understanding of life and politics*. And more women in decision-making structures.

This leads us to the second major question raised in the introduction: how to envision a far better, nuclear-free world?

### **Towards a vision of a nuclear-free world**

George Bernhard Shaw has said that most people look at the world as it is and ask: why? - but what we ought to do is to look at the world as it could be and ask: why not? I believe this is essential; we need to develop images of a nuclear-free world to help people overcome the sense of powerlessness as well as overcome the obstacles mentioned above. Admittedly it is a tall order, but it has to be done by those who see the need for change; those who benefit from the nuclear system in particular

and the military system in general cannot be expected to develop alternatives to them. While some people may concentrate on some alternative visions and strategies, others may brainstorm and advocate other changes. In the rest of this exposé, I shall focus on only a few, fully aware that there are so many other equally important aspects and themes.

*1. Globalisation must now reach the fields of politics, NGO activities, ethics, peace-making etc.*

By globalisation we mean here a truly global dialogue and exchange. Even future-thinking NGOs are often surprisingly 'provincial' thinking that if they have a national network or a European platform that will do. It will not. The economic and military globalisers truly see the world as one system, as one field of operation. They are more visionary in that sense than most alternative forces. Disarmament and de-nuclearisation must be globalised via Internet, e-mail, travels and exchanges at all levels. Meetings, dialogues and peace work in which only one culture, one civilisation or one religion is represented will be increasingly irrelevant.

*2. Top priority: Westerners must learn from others, receive spiritual and other "development aid" from non-Westerners, humbly learning rather than merely teaching.*

Teaching others (or teaching them lessons) and believing that the West is # 1 is a serious disease found among Western governments as well as many columnists, experts, alternativists and NGOs. So Westerners should ask others: how do you think we can get rid of nuclear weapons and the war system, what is your philosophy about peace and world order and can you help us?

*3. Non-violence must be taught and learned across the change community. It means studying the classics and the contemporary cases where non-violence has played a historical role.*

The present tendency of alternativists to accept warfare, national military defence, humanitarian intervention, bombings here and there is an implicit support to the nuclear system.

For instance, there is far too little debate (and resistance) among intellectuals throughout the Eastern European system (and among Western NGOs assisting them) about membership in the nuclear-based NATO alliance and the nuclear-related European Union. It is an implicit endorsement of violent conflict-resolution which, in its turn, legitimates more nuclear weapons and militarism.

*4. A new emphasis must be placed on non-violent conflict-resolution, on preventive diplomacy and violence-preventive (not conflict-preventive) policies and strategies. It must happen on the individual, the small-group level, the national, regional and the inter-national and the global level.*

That in its turn means new education. Peacemaking by peaceful means (the UN Charter norm) requires professional education in the school system, in vocational training, in NGO communities and educational settings, in national peace academies and throughout the international organisation system, such as in the OSCE and the UN. It takes at least as much education to learn to mitigate and solve conflict with as little violence as possible as it does to learn to fight wars.

*5. It is of utmost importance for democracy and pluralistic debate that NGO continues to stand for Non-Governmental and does not come to denote Near-Governmental.*

The more state-finance NGOs (and e.g. peace research) obtain, the greater the likelihood that they stop being alternatives to government politics, including nuclear and other military policies.

*6. Public education about proportions and allocations of means in this world.*

We should intensify the dissemination of information concerning the general citizenry everywhere about the allocations to the military and to repressive systems and how much good could be done in

the world if these priorities were changed. This means also helping the media to make a more relevant coverage of world affairs. Over the last 25 years of lecturing and teaching in different parts of the world, I've been surprised how unknown these proportions still are even to the socially concerned - as is, by the way, the UN Charter. It is difficult to imagine that people find it acceptable that 75,000 to 100,000 die unnecessarily every day from lack of food, water, shelter, sanitation etc (not from war) while the world's most privileged governments pour even more billions into 'security.' But how many actually know these facts? And how many feels powerless when they hear them? Neither, I am sure, do they find it acceptable that world military expenditures equal the income of the 49% poorest people on earth. The question we must address is: why is there not a mass protest, a mass willingness to change, an outrage and a cry for 'enough is enough'? Is there a deficit in awareness, in empowerment or in democracy as we know it?

*7. Central to policies for a nuclear-free world are answers to the question: how can we learn to solve perfectly natural conflicts world wide with as little violence as possible and certainly without the use of mass-destructive weapons?*

People everywhere must be given a chance to learn as much about conflicts and conflict-resolution as they do about, say, computers. We talk about ordinary illiteracy and IT illiteracy, but most of us are conflict illiterates.

Perhaps leaders should not become leaders before they have something like a driving license for conflict-management? We build safer cars and roads, we only issue driving licenses to people who have studied theory, know the traffic signs and have practised behind the wheel. Why? To reduce human suffering and the costs of accidents. This idea should be emulated when it comes to conflicts in our world. No leader would never send young boys with no military training into war, but governments and other actors carelessly send military, diplomats, lawyers, former ministers, etc out as mediators and 'conflict-managers' to conflict regions without as much as a weekend course in conflict-understanding psychology or mediation. Of course it must go wrong - and when conflict-resolution goes wrong, violence takes over and the internationals blame the local parties.

But violence comes when conflicts are deliberately provoked or ignored or wrongly treated. It comes when one sees no way out. Creative intervention with non-violent means can help avoid the tunnel vision that violence and wars are based on.

*8. The UN Charter remains the best single document for global peace-making.*

The UN is in obvious need of substantial reforms, but if more member states and decision-makers would just honour the letter and spirit of the UN Charter, the world would undoubtedly be a much more humane place than it is. It is time we really take it seriously and allocate the most competent people and much more funds to the UN and its family. The UN is the sum total of what its members make of it. When they speak warmly for nuclear abolition in the General Assembly and continue to develop nuclear systems at home, they make the world a less safe place and undermine the normative importance of the United Nations. Regional organisations as well as thousands of NGOs can contribute to the UN norm of peace by peaceful means and apply this principle to problem-solving in fields such as the environment, peace, women's issues, globalisation. And they could do more to honour this principle that is the case today.

*9. Ideas and norms are at least as important as organisational matters.*

Each human being is a potential movement for change, including nuclear abolition. Anyone who has learned something can help others understand. The idea that big governmental and non-

governmental organisations with multi-million dollar budgets are the only ones who can bring about change is utterly misleading and self-serving for exactly those organisations. It is true that we need wider co-operation because problems cross borders in an increasingly globalising world, but it does not follow that we are best helped by ever bigger units. Bigger organisations are often characterised by low levels of creativity and flexibility as well as political correctness because of dependence on government funds. And the bigger the organisation, the more power at the top and, thus, the more energy devoted to power struggles.

*10. We need alternative defence and security.*

We need defensive defence structures, only operable if a member of the international system - be it a province, a country or a region - is attacked. Long range forces with devastating destructive power (offensive defence) should become a thing of the past, since they are meant to be used only outside of one's own territory. The ideas that each country or region can keep offensive forces and credibly maintain that it has only defensive motives should again be a thing of the past. There are many ways to envision it but a combination defence of a) defensive military, b) civil, economic and structural preparation (against embargos, terror, economic crisis), c) a minimum level of self-reliance in case one should be cut off and civil protection, d) civil resistance and e) non-violent struggle are all highly relevant elements.

In a democracy some citizens may want to carry weapons, some want to help secure their society in purely civilian ways; modern defence should be responsive to both categories. But not to the wish of carrying any type of weapons: the offensive conventional and the mass-destructive weapons should be phased out a priori. Modern defence and security also implies training many young women and men in international non-violent service, mediation, reconciliation and reconstruction.

Governments and NGOs can decide also to establish "conflict consortiums" in each country consisting of area experts and conflict-resolution experts, NGOs and ministerial staff who would engage in conflicts around the world before they flare up, in short practising early warning and early listening and early action. The only thing nobody needs is the authoritarian "you-have-no-choice-but-NATO-membership" and exclusively military defence technically capable of offence. It goes against democracy and it goes against the simple fact that different peoples and different cultures face different security challenges and thus cannot all be fed the same standard solution imposed by Western power.

We have touched upon a series of themes and initiatives for the future: multi-cultural dialogue and mutual learning, basic nonviolence, public education and education in conflict-management, global norms and the importance of the UN Charter's provisions, global conflict-management that promotes violence-prevention and violence-reduction and, finally, alternative multi-layered defence compatible with genuine democracy.

*If a development took place in this direction grosso modo, the 'need' for nuclear weapons and other violent means would be reduced.* The only way I can see us moving in that direction is dialogue, dialogue and more dialogue. And it should revolve around "the four 'Cs': coalition-building, constructivism, creativity and concrete visions of more humane, just and peaceful societies.

We need to throw off the *fear* that tells us that change is more dangerous than continuing with the present policies. Instead we need the *hope* and the *vision* that democracy, justice, development and peace means freedom from nuclearism and reduction of violence to zero. It can be done in many

ways and the above elements can be combined in thousands of ways. There will never be one concept of world peace but only many smaller 'peaces' that make up a global unity in diversity.

Hopefully, we shall never see the thesis confirmed that there has to be a nuclear accident or war before people get together and act. Let's begin now and work with a deep conviction that there is common sense and an empowering democracy through which nuclear abolition can be achieved. Until we have tried much more intensely, we do not know that it is impossible.

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