

Nukes Kill...But Can We Live Without Them?

Alternative Security Theories to Break the Nuclear Addiction

BY CHELSEA COLLONGE

I saw a T-shirt the other day with a picture of people linking arms. It said, "Guns don't protect people... people do." I've been spending my days organizing for a shift in nuclear weapons policy through my work with Nevada Desert Experience. We don't like nuclear weapons — so much so that we'd like to see every last one dismantled and don't mind saying so. Decades of nuclear testing in Nevada have shown that nuclear weapons are a vast suck of public money (\$6 trillion since 1943) that poisons the environment on which we all depend. Thousands of people in Utah and Idaho, downwind of the test site's radioactive fallout, have paid for nukes not just with their taxes, but also with their lives.

But despite the nastiness of nuclear weapons production, can we really say with sincerity, "Nuclear weapons don't protect people, people do"? I believe we can, using alternative concepts of security that are more realistic for the world's security needs than the so-called realism of the deterrence theory.

NONVIOLENCE

Nonviolence is more than a tool for creating change; it is a way of keeping people safe, based on a belief in the inefficacy of violence for creating security. Quaker William Penn wrote in 1682:

"We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by Love and Information. And yet we could hurt no Man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: For if Men did once see we Love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains."

My favorite example of protective love in action is from Michael Nagler's *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*. An old woman was walking to her apartment with grocery bags when she saw two people approaching her threateningly. Suspecting that they intended to take her purse, she said to them, "Excuse me young men, I am wondering if you would be willing to help me carry these bags up to my apartment." Caught off guard and touched by her respect for them, the men did just that.

Nonviolent security can also operate on a larger scale. Un-

armed, human rights accompaniment by groups like Peace Brigades International has kept many activists safe from government repression. Gandhi took this idea of third-party non-violent intervention further when he proposed developing a *shanti sena*, or peace army, to protect a country from invaders through mass nonviolent interposition. The world saw a version of this in Czechoslovakia in 1968 during Prague Spring, when Czechs nonviolently resisted Soviet occupation. This technique of rehumanizing relationships with occupying soldiers while resisting the regime is known as "civilian based defense."

TOTAL SECURITY

Also called human security and comprehensive national security, the theory of total security postulates that true security requires much more than freedom from attack, but also economic and personal well-being.

Jackie Cabasso, director of Western States Legal Foundation and chair of the Redefining Security working group of United for Peace and Justice, uses this concept to show the self-defeating nature of nuclear security. "Since the nuclear age was born, in secret, some 60 years ago, workers at nuclear facilities and populations living outside their fence lines have borne a disproportionate share of the risks associated with nuclear weapons, often without their knowledge, and always without their consent... When community members raise questions about the justification for nuclear weapons programs or activities in public forums such as hearings and comments on environmental impact statements, they are silenced with one response: 'national security.' ... [Human] security, which is universal, cannot be brought about through nuclear weapons and military might. It can only be ensured through the equitable distribution of adequate food, shelter, clean water and air, health care, and education."

COMMON SECURITY

The "soft" security of human needs is important, but what about "hard" security, like protecting people from nuclear attack by another state? The answer lies in Emma Goldman's ob-

ervation that “the freedom of each is rooted in the freedom of all.” Common security posits that no group can be secure without other groups enjoying security at the same time. It is more secure to have a former opponent who does not want to attack than to have a present opponent who can’t attack you.

Since the end of the Cold War we have seen increased nuclear proliferation by states that feel vulnerable to attack by current nuclear weapons states. The 2002 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review explicitly names seven countries — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, China, Russia and North Korea — as targets for first use of U.S. nuclear weapons. With this in mind, it makes sense that some of these states have sought their own nuclear deterrent. North Korea’s Kim Jong Il declared, “The Iraqi war teaches a lesson, that in order

to prevent a war and defend the security of a country it is necessary to have a powerful physical deterrent force.”

The U.S., with its plans to spend \$150 billion to revamp its nuclear complex and produce 125 new nuclear weap-

ons per year under the Complex 2030 and Reliable Replacement Warhead programs, claims that its 10,000 nukes are for deterrence purposes. Yet in addition to making other countries feel unsafe, the U.S. is reinforcing the notion that nuclear weapons are a prerequisite for status on the international scene (look at the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council) while undermining its own ability to persuade other countries to forsake the nuclear option.

NUCLEAR ABOLITION

We have seen how nuclear weapons undermine international security, especially in an age of terrorism where proliferation increases nuclear materials accessible to groups that are nonterritorial and therefore undeterrable. But is there any alternative to nuclear deterrence? Now that nuclear weapons have been invented and “the genie is out of the bottle,” is there any way to safely disarm? Is nuclear abolition possible?

In 1997, civil society groups developed a Model Nuclear Weapons Convention (MNWC), which Costa Rica has submitted annually to the U.N. General Assembly. Modeled on the effective conventions against biological and chemical weapons, the MNWC is an addition to the 1970 Nonproliferation Treaty regime, which has been eroded by the nuclear weapons states’ refusal to implement their end of the treaty’s grand bargain: good-faith movement toward disarmament under Article VI.

The treaty answers many questions about verification, irreversibility and how to deal with potential breakout by states.

www.calpeacepower.org

The 2002 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review explicitly names seven countries — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, China, Russia and North Korea — as targets for first use of U.S. nuclear weapons.



Photo courtesy of National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office

What happens if a state is able to secretly re-arm, and no other country has a nuclear deterrent? The draft provides answers to such questions and can be found at <www.middlepowers.org/mpi/docs/model_convention.pdf>. It states, “The real risk of breakout inherent in a nuclear disarmament regime must be measured not against a perfect nuclear weapons free world — where breakout is impossible — but against the world we live in today... The development of a nuclear weapon free regime will itself change the security situation. In the longer term, owing in part to the Nuclear Weapons Convention, global collective security arrangements may develop that are capable of effectiveness against any state breaching the NWC.”

Nuclear abolition is not just possible and not just desirable, but it is also essential for global human survival. Nuclear weapons are meant to “never be used,” but their development and testing has been a 60-year secret war by nuclear weapons states against their own people and the environment. Whether it’s

accidental nuclear use, deliberate attack by a terrorist group, or a pre-emptive counter-proliferation nuclear strike by a nuclear weapon state like the U.S., one hydrogen bomb of the kind we have today would permanently destroy everyone’s hope for a secure life. We can’t put the splitting of the atom back in the bottle, but there is a way out of the nuclear maze if global civil society pressures our governments to invest in the global security that comes through international law. Our willingness to explore alternative security theories may just make the difference in the choice Martin Luther King offered us, “the choice between nonviolence and nonexistence.”

Chelsea Collonge is a recent UC Berkeley graduate who currently works for Nevada Desert Experience
<www.nevadadesertexperience.org>.

Resources:

- Downwinders United
<www.downwinders.org>
- UN Commission on Human Security
<www.humansecurity-chs.org/>
- Model Nuclear Weapons Convention
<www.lcnp.org/mnwc/index.htm>
- Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
<www.dfat.gov.au/cc/cchome.html>
- Peace Boat – Youth Ambassadors’ Plan for Nuclear Disarmament
<www.peaceboat.org/english/nwps/sm/arc/050829/index.html>
- Civil Society Review of Hans Blix’s WMD Commission Final Report, 2007
<www.wmdreport.org/pages/policymemo.htm>