

The Way is the Goal: Disarmament Now!

2/19/06 Greg Mello

It would be naïve to imagine that we can directly confront Empire. Our strategy must be to isolate Empire's working parts and disable them one by one. No target is too small. No victory too insignificant...if it is to succeed, it has to begin here. In America. The only institution more powerful than the U.S. government is American civil society...you have the power of proximity.¹

Précis

Can we achieve nuclear disarmament, and if so how? I will argue that we can, that it is a work within our power, and that to do so requires neither a large social movement in the usual sense (which is not going to happen) nor new domestic laws or international treaties, although these latter two may follow and codify prior developments.

For simplicity's sake I will refer to two distinguishable policy narratives or themes, that of disarmament-and-nonproliferation on the one hand ("disarmament"), and that of nuclear arms control-and-nonproliferation ("arms control") on the other. These overlap and of course mingle with many other issues and complications, but in practice they are relatively distinct for a variety of reasons.

In the international arena, most disarmament efforts now being made are failing because the well-intentioned, expert actors involved have no standing or membership, let alone adequate power. The best way to improve these efforts may be to direct most of them away from elite international forums and instead towards focused civil society efforts at key locations. There is no real difference between effective local, national, and international strategy.

On the U.S. domestic front, there is a total absence of any disarmament narrative in Washington, DC, at most of the weapons sites, and almost everywhere else. So the growing acceptance of nuclear weapons and the boldness of current proposals can only be only expected.

I will argue that the general absence of political aspiration and will among domestic peace and security non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many of their funders, and arms control academics is a far more potent problem than the resistance we face from the nuclear weapons complex and the Administration running it.

The causes of this malaise are various – sheer demoralization in the face of the tsunami of problems we face, a desire to avoid disarmament in some of the prime movers, simple careerism, peer pressure, force of intellectual habit, and key gaps in knowledge or understanding rank among them. We all share in most of these traits. Our times call for uncommon insight and personal courage. Peace and security professionals, above all, must move against strong, career-breaking currents and therefore may not be able to provide the leadership we need.

A common factor in all these relatively fruitless domestic and international strategies, in both the arms control and disarmament spheres, is the belief that prestige-oriented events and processes, top-down organizing, and centralized control in all their many variations and disguises can accomplish what we need.

¹ Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*, South End Press, 2004, pp. 66-67.

Progress in nuclear disarmament will require instead: 1) a clear, inclusive, morally-based disarmament message that is part of a broader political platform of human and environmental security; 2) wresting investment from prestige-oriented, business-as-usual efforts in order to support worthy local efforts with prestige and money; and 3) a clear intellectual and organizational demarcation between disarmament efforts and those which implicitly assume the legitimacy and indefinite continuance of nuclear arsenals along with tacit support for U.S. military and economic aggression worldwide.

The real dissolution of nuclear complexes, in their material and immaterial aspects, may lead, not follow, formal policy reform at this time. Disarmament can progress far through the social application of well-established norms and existing laws, without new laws or any policy volte-face.

Further, I will argue that disarmament has an immaterial aspect that not only *can* occur suddenly, but indeed *must* do so – that “suddenness” is an inherent and revealing aspect of any political solution to the problems we face. In addition, we have strengths we have not embraced, latent political power we have not harvested. To do so we will need to imaginatively and intimately *enact, present, and personalize* resistance to nuclear weapons, re-moralizing and enlivening ourselves, our communities, and the public debate, which must be conducted in new places as well as in new ways.

Our society, economy, and environment are now beginning convergent crises that will rapidly and totally change the political landscape, making it increasingly chaotic and overturning all business as usual. Old hopes are fading and new opportunities and allies are appearing. Our ability to even see these opportunities, let alone exploit them, will depend upon our efforts to intellectually and organizationally link nuclear disarmament with broader platforms of human security. Success or failure in disarmament will now largely depend upon the relation of our efforts to much larger, and soon thoroughly insistent, issues.

Themes

1. It is vitally important to be clear about what we want in this field, which is also what we stand for, who we are, and what we principally communicate.
2. Nuclear weapons policies are not all they are cracked up to be.
3. The nuclear weapons complex is both more, and less, than its appearance; its apparent strengths are compromised by great weaknesses.
4. Disinvestment is disarmament.
5. We have untapped sources of strength.
6. Politics as usual is over; there will be major economic, political, and environmental disruptions from here on out.
7. We can make no distinction between local, national, and international strategies.
8. Live nuclear free: disarmament now!

1. It is vitally important to be clear about what we want in this field, which is also what we stand for, who we are, and what we principally communicate.

A wide variety of approaches to nuclear disarmament are possible and underway – international, national, and regional, to use a false distinction we will abandon further on. All can effectively advance nuclear disarmament, but only to the extent key principles are involved and key human values invoked. Without these, no effort will neither advance and none will cohere.

It is our collective experience since the Cold War that all political means to achieve nuclear disarmament which have not explicitly *stated* the end desired – and so to that degree *contained* and *embodied* it – have consistently backfired and failed.

Of course, many arms control efforts have *not* really aimed at nuclear disarmament, not even implicitly or incrementally. For the moment let's examine the results without consideration of motive.

Domestically, these failures include:

- The failure of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ratification. This was almost a foregone conclusion after the arms control community implicitly and explicitly endorsed the stockpile stewardship (SS) program from 1995 onwards. The SS program lacked technical justification; it roughly doubled the size of the weapons programs at the nuclear laboratories; it extended and greatly increased the power of the weapons complex; its goals included a complete suite of new, untested weapons; and it extended the legitimacy of the weapons themselves through the critical post- Cold War period when nuclear weapons were most threatened.
- The failure to achieve, after the late 1990s, either quantitative nuclear disarmament or to block continuous upgrade of nuclear weapons systems. The former was not a key objective of the arms control community; denial that the latter could even occur was an article of faith in the same community and may still be so today, despite all evidence.
- The failure to shrink the nuclear weapons infrastructure. This was never an objective of the arms control community and was never a consistent objective of the civil society groups at the several sites.
- The failure to stop, so far, a new program to replace all the warheads in the U.S. arsenal. This program was unopposed until this year by almost all parties and is now the single largest new programmatic commitment in the U.S. nuclear weapons program. The program, if it proceeds over any length of time, is likely to incorporate new military characteristics, including: lower and higher yield options; earth penetration options; increased accuracy; greater range and maneuverability; greater targeting flexibility; increased integration with other elements of global strike; and increased promptness of strike. (Many of these improvements arise in other programs, of course; continuous nuclear warhead evolution merely facilitates their realization.) All in all, what was once called the “stockpile stewardship” program and may now be called the “secure stockpile initiative” will enable new uses for nuclear weapons in an evolving system of nuclear threat within the broader paradigm of global strike.

I would further suggest that the few domestic U.S. successes we have seen, such as executive branch acquiescence to the CTBT itself, have been largely the expression of broad societal

disapproval of nuclear weapons *per se* applied in and through particular opportunities, rather than technical arms control victories achieved independently of that broad disapproval.² *It is desire for disarmament that fuels arms control, which the latter consumes, marginalizes, and stifles.*

These narrow victories, such as they are, have been achieved at the cost of increasing nuclear weapons legitimacy in post Cold War America. The cost has been greater than the benefits, if indeed there have been any benefits at all. *Even tactical defeats for disarmament, as part of a broader strategy for victory, would be better than Pyrrhic victories that have each one left us weaker than the last.*

The principal barrier to progress in nuclear disarmament in the U.S. today is the failure of most liberal foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to seek it. The arms control narrative, while failing to erect any genuinely coherent intellectual or moral framework of its own, provides an easy way “out” for journalists, politicians, NGOs, foundations, diplomats, and citizens, all of whom are led thereby into a cul-de-sac hardly distinguishable from the government’s own propaganda.

With these failures noted, I would like to propose that all effective approaches to nuclear disarmament have a common, indispensable element, a factor which a) gives great power, b) allows synergy between otherwise independent efforts, and c) extends the realm of action not just in space but also in time, both into the future and into the past.

This indispensable element is the explicit acknowledgment of the truth that nuclear weapons, without qualification, are totally illegal, socially illegitimate, and immoral in all contexts and for all purposes.

² I do not think that defeat of the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP) or the Modern Pit Facility (MPF) amount to victories quite yet, since the central thrusts of both of these programs are continuing today under other names, and are even doing so without much opposition so far.

In the case of the MPF, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) had, in 2002, at least three different plans to reestablish pit (bomb core) production, including the MPF *per se*, laboratory production, and “re-purposing” another unnamed facility, probably the Pit Disassembly and Conversion Facility at Savannah River. It was very good to defeat one of these, if indeed that has happened, but we should not delude ourselves as to the relative and qualified nature of the victory.

Today a fourth option, the “Consolidated Nuclear Production Complex,” a reprise of plans current in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been endorsed by two important actors – the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board and implicitly the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water.

The reason pit production plans are so “undead,” and perennially return with such vigor and variety, is that when specific projects are opposed by the great majority of NGO actors, the idea of pit production *per se* is not opposed. It is rather confirmed. What has been offered by the NGO community, in this case so far, is pit production peer review.

In the case of RNEP, the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) is likely to contain all the objectionable elements of the RNEP but is much more broadly-rooted across warheads and weapon systems, and fully engages all parts of the design and production complex. One of the main political problems for RNEP was that it had the potential to bleed funds from New Mexico facilities; RRW, first proposed and developed by Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), does not have that defect.

It would not be quite right to say that RRW is simply a new name for RNEP, or for stockpile stewardship, or for the Submarine Warhead Protection Program (SWPP). RRW, however, does use all the same resources, programs, facilities, and people as those programs, and it uses the products of the earlier programs exactly in the way foreseen and desired a decade ago.

This truth about nuclear weapons may or may not be emphasized at every moment but we ignore it at our political peril. It must be explicitly present in order for synergy between otherwise independent efforts to occur and political power for disarmament to develop.³

Per se condemnation of nuclear weapons is fully compatible with a practical *realpolitik* that harmonizes with current political realities. Indeed, *per se* condemnation is the only approach to nuclear weapons that *is* politically and legally realistic. Without such an explicit value-based (i.e. moral) and law-based core, all would-be “incremental” approaches will fail.

They will fail in three main ways.

First and foremost, they fail *suddenly and by definition* because it is precisely human values that we are trying to communicate and elevate in politics. Our purpose is not to provide peer review for the nuclear weapons complex and its doctrines. Nuclear weapons in use are more deadly than death camps; it’s not our job to provide death-camp peer review.

In any politics involving human values, including the politics of nuclear weapons, there can be no final distinction between ends and means, between strategies and goals.⁴

To champion human values is inseparable from their expression. *Dissimulation about our goals for the sake of disarmament looks a lot like desertion*. Denial is not in our interest. “Hidden” or “clever” or “nuanced” opposition to nuclear weapons, as many advise and many practice, communicates a lack of opposition to nuclear weapons and little else. The phrase “too clever by half” comes to mind.

The opposite of dissimulation and denial is *candor*, which expresses who we are and shapes who we become. We communicate *that*, first and foremost. If we do not express the core human values and the political goals which brought us to speak in the first place, who exactly are we and why have we come to speak?

There can be no solace in the idea that while circumstances call for circumspection, our private views may remain intact. In the first place this is not how human beings work – our social and political face is indeed our *face*. In second place our private views just don’t matter in this regard – *politics*, as opposed to *rule*, occurs in public. In the third place our arguments will be weak. What argument can be built from the implicit premise that nuclear weapons are useful and acceptable? The weakness of this premise is widely appreciated, as polls show. In the fourth place, dissimulation destroys resistance from the inside by creating a moral problem in its innermost heart, rotting its culture and bringing forward leaders few will follow. Machiavelli may have advised deception for his prince, but democracy can’t be rebuilt on a foundation of deception.⁵

³ Political power for nuclear disarmament is also, *ipso facto*, political power to prevent nuclear use in war. Potential sudden use is invariably implicit in the possession of nuclear weapons; strictures against use which are silent about possession do not significantly diminish the risk of use, which would in all cases occur only in exigencies that would vacate all prior agreements. The only way to stigmatize and thus help prevent nuclear use, the conditions for which may arise suddenly and with no opportunity for political activity, is to stigmatize possession.

⁴ I think the ends/means distinction is really far more widely inapplicable in democratic politics, but I am confining myself here only to politics that explicitly involve major value choices, e.g. whether or not to incinerate thousands or even millions of people as a planned contingency for national “defense.”

⁵ Nuclear weapons are inherently incompatible with democracy, as many have pointed out. Several independent lines of evidence point to this reality. Two of these are the contrast between polling data (public attitudes) and state practice and the contrast between the actual utility of nuclear weapons for citizen security (zero) with state practice. In addition, there is the problem of secrecy and surveillance, as well as the problem of cultural nihilism. The inherent lack of democratic enfranchisement and accountability in targeting and the initiation of nuclear war is another. Andrew Lichterman, reviewing this evidence, suggests that the presence and legitimacy of nuclear weapons in a society is a crude negative barometer of democracy, if I have understood him correctly.

In today's political scene, it is primarily social conservatives who have understood the power of candor and clarity of goals and they have acted on this understanding with great effect.

Second, I think failure to condemn nuclear weapons while offering nuclear peer review instead assures political defeat in the long run even when it leads to short-term gains (which, again, I do not see). For example, suggesting that pit production at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) might be a good alternative to the Modern Pit Facility (MPF) and thus help defeat the latter, as some have done, is not just bad expert advice but bad disarmament strategy, as I have discussed elsewhere.⁶

Third, moral discourse is the only way to communicate and coordinate efforts across large numbers of people, organizations, and issues, and finally across time and history itself. It is thus the only way to accumulate any significant political power.

Conscience, "con-science," is what we know together as human beings. Our conscience is what makes us human, and it makes us human *together*. When the Einstein-Russell manifesto calls us to "Remember your humanity, and forget the rest," it is our common human conscience which is to be remembered; expertise and clever strategies are as straws in comparison.

Milan Kundera famously identified such memory with the struggle against tyranny: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

If we do "remember" in this way, we won't need as many conference calls. If we do not, all the conference calls, strategic planning sessions, and facilitated conferences in the world won't help. Facilitated discussions don't change values; if you have a common moral understanding you can skip the extra expense as we are doing here right now. You will have intimacy – and intimacy, after all is said and done, is what you need.

We know that very large institutions, if their components are to be flexible and creative and not mere robots, must be mostly managed by shared ideology. There really is no other way. How much more is this true for large numbers of independent organizations and actors, most of whom are volunteers with many other important things to do with their time!⁷

The idea, now current in some foundation circles, that a large number of nonprofits in our field can be "coordinated" to take actions toward a "vision" of nuclear disarmament by means of managerial legerdemain, "messaging" techniques, and a common desire for foundation funding is foolish in the extreme. What results from this sort of thing is a half-hearted, lowest-common-denominator approach to complex problems that is and will remain inherently weak – intellectually, morally, and politically. Fatal political weakness in the final product is apparently not considered too great a price to pay for centralized control. Instead of high moral purpose – *which would be a sudden victory in itself, and capable of mobilizing volunteers across the country and beyond* – the central organizing principle is the desire for funding from the foundations involved, and the associated fear of not getting any. Whatever the goals, such a process creates captive professionals and drains away moral inspiration, moving the field

⁶ Greg Mello, "U.S. Nuclear Warhead Research and Production: With No Real Debate, Diminishing Prospects for Control," INESAP *Bulletin* #23, April 2004, at <http://www.inesap.org/bulletin23/art01.htm>.

⁷ An example of the role of clear moral ideas in substituting for and improving upon managerial coordination is provided by the village of Le Chambon in Nazi-occupied southern France. Townspeople there spirited a large number of Jewish children to safety under the very noses of the Gestapo. Their success despite active Gestapo suppression measures occurred in no small part because they had no plan to discover, no one in charge to detain or kill, and no organization to infiltrate. They did have a common morality that transcended the differences in religion in the town, which were great. Without a clear goal based on a common morality, no amount of money, no degree of coalition or coordination, and no amount of managerial skill would have been adequate. As it was, these managerial techniques, so favored in the nonprofit community today, were not needed.

precisely in the wrong direction. It is very difficult for me to see how this kind of approach will help bring about nuclear disarmament, despite the best of intentions.

Instead, I think coordination of effort is generally (but not always) undesirable on any but a small scale. There is a tradeoff between scale and intensity in all coordination. The only possible means of coordination in large-scale efforts is through common human values, i.e. “conscience,” as said before. Effective large-scale managerial “collaboration” of organizations in the absence of clear, common moral goals is doomed.

*It is only through explicit common moral values that broad cross-issue campaigns can be built.*⁸ Since it is unlikely that nuclear disarmament can be effective as a single issue, even when twinned with nuclear nonproliferation, it is to allied and related issues involving human security and dignity that we must turn to add salience to a popular, but not otherwise salient, issue.

Clear moral values communicate through time, expanding the vital present – the only moment in which we can act – to include the past and future. This gives a terrific expansion of power. By placing our struggle in continuity with the “partnership of generations”⁹ the hallowed story of our intellectual and moral forebears becomes our own story, and we in turn embody their story afresh. The hands of our ancestors lighten our burdens, and the children of the future, whose very existence depends upon our work, call to us and encourage us. Many hear them.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, the vehicle which creates this expansion of power is the *vow*. It is vows which comprise the moral bridge between past and future, transcending person and mortality. “I made no vows, but vows / Were then made for me.”¹⁰ Vows, like promises in the personal context and contracts in the legal one, bind the future. *Contra* Marx, all that is solid need not always melt into air.

We do well to emphasize the continuity of our efforts with those of the past. It would be to our advantage personally, in terms of organizing, and in terms of social acceptance. Past events often gain prestige by antiquity alone; heroic men and women reviled by the powerful in their own time are universally praised today. We need to bring their prestige to our own work – or shall I say bring ourselves to their level, in intimacy with them?

Such efforts help remind us that nuclear disarmament is an essentially conservative cause, based on “grandmother” values and the deepest core principles of our, or any, civilization. Richelieu once remarked that revolutionaries decrease their power by half by virtue of their rebellion. We seek to restore democracy, not to overthrow it as Mr. Cheney and Mr. Bush are so effectively doing today.

I wish to conclude this theme with a passage from Praful Bidwai, an Indian anti-nuclear journalist whom some of you perhaps know:

Such a movement [for nuclear disarmament] must be broad-based and inclusive, yet it must be lucidly clear about its goals lest it stray from its main functions. It must recognize that people will come to the disarmament platform out of a range of considerations and motives, and from different social and ideological

⁸ Note the use of the term “campaign,” as opposed to “coalition.” It is a crucial difference. Campaigns are far more practical than coalitions, which have great costs and few marginal benefits.

⁹ Edmund Burke: “[Society] is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”

¹⁰ Wordsworth, “The Prelude,” Book IV

backgrounds. But at the same time, it must carefully articulate principles and doctrines in such a way as to retain its identity, integrity, and effectiveness....

Beyond these premises, a disarmament movement may have legitimate internal differences...Historically, such differences have never prevented disarmament campaigns from becoming effective. What has crippled them is lack of clarity on the point that nuclear weapons are wholly evil, unacceptable and indefensible -- that is, failure to mobilise enough moral force internally. Moral force is all-important when you are rolling back an epochal injustice. Without it, India could not have achieved independence, nor South Africa liberation from apartheid. On such morality, there can be no compromise.¹¹

2. Nuclear weapons policies are not all they are cracked up to be.

Nuclear weapons and policies are an embarrassment to many who make them. This embarrassment could be made to grow. This is one of the truths of nuclear secrecy, namely, that a great deal of it is driven by shame and the need to suppress system-shattering revelations of a variety of kinds. This shame and embarrassment is a great source of strength to us, but is of course largely unavailable if we condone nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons are beset with secrecy; they are shameful; they are also technical, which is a *de facto* secrecy for non-specialists. For these three reasons, nuclear weapons policy is not the result of a fully-conscious political process and so is not actually a conscious *policy* at all. There is a policy to be sure; it is written in a book; but few who write the book read it; fewer understand it; and fewer still are invested politically in it. "Policy" is to that degree therefore a) somewhat unstable and b) frequently divorced from practice.

Further, the actual nature of policy formation in general is inchoate, distributed in society, unknowable, and unpredictable. There is no describable "policy process," as in "Civics 101." Legislative and executive acts are not always the efficient causes of policy; which may be as much or more the result of prior changes in the economy, in social norms and practices, or stem from other events external to government. The role of citizens in governance, in other words, isn't just to elect lawmakers, and policy is not the monopoly of government. Policy options available to lawmakers and administrators are limited by various realities, and even in a dictatorship one of those realities is public opinion.

Policy *reform* likewise occurs in many ways. A policy which does not "work" for some reason will likely be changed and in the meantime cannot be followed. Much of what organizations like ours do is not oriented toward changing policy directly but toward finding ways to make existing policies, half-hearted as they really are for the above reasons, fail. Many do fail. Helping government fail is not always so very hard.

If a failed policy isn't changed, it may remain dysfunctional and moribund. This may not be a bad thing. More efficient management of bad programs isn't good. While we might like Congress to wake up tomorrow and admit to the error of its nuclear weapons ways, we may more easily arrange in the meantime for disinvestment, senescence, declining morale, staggering overhead and inefficiency, and bad management.

¹¹ Praful Bidwai, "The Struggle for Nuclear Disarmament," in *Out of the Nuclear Shadow*, Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian, eds., 2001.

We can, in other words, progress *in fact* when progress *in law* is stalled. Such progress generally requires that our basic condemnation of nuclear weapons remains clear and visible, as I will now argue.

3. The nuclear weapons complex is both more, and less, than its appearance; its apparent strengths are compromised by great weaknesses.

What do I mean by “nuclear weapons complex?” First of all, I mean the NNSA and Department of Defense (DoD) nuclear weapons facilities, their contractors and subcontractors, and so on. I mean the materiel – the nuclear weapons and nuclear materials, the delivery systems, and the command & control systems. We have to include the money – the federal appropriations supported by federal receipts and borrowing. We must include the people in the executive branch and in the captive portions of the legislative branch, those uniformed military involved, the contractor personnel, and anyone else I may be forgetting.

So far so good.

We also have to include knowledge. Some of it is objective – written down in reports and books and in electronic media of various kinds. Other knowledge is tacit, the unwritten knowledge held by skilled people – craft skills. Some is institutional knowledge, not really belonging to any one person but held in the functioning organization as a whole. If the manner of operations changes, the ability to produce a certain complex outcome, such as a nuclear test, might not be easily restored.

Making it all work, keeping folks on the job and allowing them to communicate and work productively with one another also requires common beliefs, commitments, ideology, and purposes. These aspects of institutional “software” are closely allied with social legitimacy of the enterprise, perceived social authority of its leaders, morale of the staff, and with the perceived moral justification and social acceptance of the institution’s mission.

For the weapons complex, this “software,” for which we can take “morale” as a shorthand expression, is a necessary aspect of successful operation, recruitment, and retention. This software is mostly social, political, moral, and spiritual. It is subject to sudden changes and it is not governed by strictly quantitative calculations. It is understood to be of primary importance by the managers of the weapons complex themselves. Understanding it is absolutely key to understanding the quest for novel nuclear weapons, as well as to understanding the nonviolent political dynamics of the nuclear struggle.

So when former STRATCOM Commander in Chief Lee Butler said the nuclear “beast” has a kind of “soul,” he was right. As he said, “[t]he nuclear beast must be chained, its soul expunged, its lair laid waste.”¹² Indeed. That is our mission – not to provide better management, more security, more cost-effective pit production, or safer operations. These issues may from time to time play minor and supporting roles, but only if they do not undercut our central mission and message.

To sum this up, we can say that nuclear disarmament is the inverse of nuclear armament. Nuclear armament requires many things, some material, some immaterial. All of them must work together just so. The negation or destruction of even *one* key nuclear requirement will result in nuclear disarmament.

¹² Lee Butler, speech at the “State of the World Forum,” October 3, 1996, http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/1996/10/03_butler_chaining.htm.

From these considerations it is abundantly clear that the struggle for nuclear disarmament, like all conflicts, has a spiritual aspect. From this perspective, changes in fortune can be sudden, and we may not even see them. As Neitzche said somewhere, history changes at midnight, in silence. The beginning of real nuclear disarmament, like a height of land beyond which streams flow to the sea, may not be obvious. Today's events may have quite a different meaning tomorrow.

Making nuclear weapons is very difficult; many people must do complicated things and the whole must be successfully explained, accepted, and coordinated. Active social investment is required from many actors inside and out. Almost complete public passivity is also required. Public condemnation of nuclear weapons by only a relatively few people, if it is effective, can wreck this house of cards. Social disinvestment in nuclear weapons is real disarmament.

Effective public condemnation of nuclear weapons is real nuclear disarmament.

4. Disinvestment is disarmament.

Let's try and unpack this further.

Can nuclear weapons be effectively "abolished" by a process of gradual neglect (official and unofficial), by forgetfulness, chaotic policies, *de facto* social and political disinterest and active disapproval, by institutional senescence, by the imposition of a constraining network of rules given declining mission importance,¹³ by the decay of skills, tacit knowledge, the ability to recruit and retain, morale, and technical ability? I think the answer is yes, at least to a degree.

To put it another way, in the general decline we face, can nuclear weapons *in particular* decline, and do so a step ahead of the means to control and condemn them? Who shall decline first, we or they? Who shall be the last person, and what shall be the last argument, left standing?

The "last argument" or "last word" is important. Nuclear weapons derive their supposed utility from their absolute character. They are to be the *ultima ratio*, the final guarantors of victory and national survival, the absolute weapons. This, supposedly, is why the U.S. keeps them.

The actual reasons nuclear weapons are kept are of course quite different than this. They do not confer victory; they do not guarantee national survival; they do not make citizens safer and indeed there are no circumstances in which nuclear use would be to citizens' advantage. What nuclear weapons indisputably do provide the U.S. has nothing to do with their military utility and everything to do with the *reputation* of their power, which brings real power to shape events. *Attacking the prestige of nuclear weapons directly assaults the benefits they bring the state. In nuclearspeak, the "credibility" of the "deterrent" declines.* If nuclear weapons are a permanent source of conflict at home and condemnation abroad, the utility of nuclear weapons as instruments of state power is challenged at its source. *Controversy itself* discredits the nuclear claim of absolute power.¹⁴

¹³ Bumper sticker reported in Los Alamos: "A safe, work-free zone."

¹⁴ I omit here the utility of nuclear weapons to other parties, principally private and public corporations and politicians. The sharp concentration of military contracting in just a few giant, specialized companies, and within this industry the rise of specialized nuclear weapons contractors like BWXT which derive nearly all their income and profits from nuclear weapons, which are indemnified against litigation related to nuclear materials and nuclear waste, and which need place few of their own meager assets at risk yet remain beyond the reach of laws constraining civil government, is profoundly dangerous. Nuclear weapons contractors are the largest federal campaign contributors in New Mexico. It is the U.S., however, which pays them.

When nuclear weapons are no longer a “growth industry,” when they are no longer associated with the creative forces in society and are instead associated with senescence, decay, and decline, something happens to their social prestige and political legitimacy. When this happens, the ways in which these weapons are “not useful,” and instead *burdens* and *liabilities* to the state, expand. The stories told about nuclear weapons by journalists change. All sorts of problems which were not seen before suddenly become interesting to news editors. As nuclear prestige contracts, the political space in which nuclear decisions can be made, such as use in war, contracts.

In this scenario, national policy would then finally track what are perceived as constraints imposed by “new circumstances.” Nobody will “come clean,” since discussion of past mistakes would decrease the prestige of the state and politicians involved. Perhaps mistakes were made, but no one is now to blame and it is time to “move on.”¹⁵

5. We have untapped sources of strength.

There are many of these and I am only going to mention a few.

We know disarmament is very popular, much more popular than arms control or current policy. Polls consistently show this.¹⁶

In addition, we have very numerous UN resolutions condemning nuclear possession and use, which is to say we have the testimony of states.

We have Article VI of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and its authoritative interpretation by the International Court of Justice, which requires complete nuclear disarmament, a clear legal mandate under international as well as domestic law. Our legal position is very strong and supports *per se* illegality of nuclear weapons, as Charles Moxley, Frances Boyle, and others have suggested. One interpretation of this legal situation is that we do not need new treaties and laws, just enforcement of the laws we have – societal enforcement, most likely. If we cannot make treaty law we can make customary law and display the dictates of the public conscience – and we should.

We have nuclear free zone treaties covering much of the earth.

There have been hundreds of civil society campaigns producing statements of public conscience, including the [Call for Nuclear Disarmament](#) in New Mexico.¹⁷

Beyond all human opinion and law we also have some *facts* that form the bedrock of our position. What facts? One of them is that there is a deep contradiction between nuclear weapons and human values. Any number of religious statements and positions refer to this, but it’s important that we ourselves come to understand and believe this in our own context, a process which will invariably lead to creative, powerful, persuasive expression.

¹⁵ Move on, that is, to another *ultima ratio* that is better militarily, better for the prestige of the state, or both. This new killing technique will then be described, at least internally, as more “useful” than nuclear weapons. These new killing techniques are likely to be more “useful” either a) because they have more precise and tailored effects – that is, because they do not “self-deter” – or b) because war can be waged with them without attribution or retaliation. In the latter case, no one will be responsible, and deterrence will be sought in a vague nimbus of individually unaccountable, untraceable actions indistinguishable from the weather, vandalism, theft, malfunction, or disloyalty. The boundary between unlimited war and organized crime – never firm – will collapse. A third possibility, cryptic genocide by means of tailored biological agents, is also a logical extension of current trends.

¹⁶ See <http://www.lasg.org/PressAdvisory3-31-05.htm> and http://www.lasg.org/WMDreport_04_15_04.pdf for two such recent polls.

¹⁷ See <http://www.lasg.org>.

Opinion is one thing. Put opinions together and you will have a pile of opinions. This may be very useful. *Belief* on the other hand – a particular understanding of reality – is quite another, especially if it involves some of the deepest obligations we as human beings can have. This process of investigation, clarification, and liberation can be described in religious or in political terms. It is both.

Another fact we must face is that nuclear proliferation cannot be controlled if nuclear weapons are considered legitimate by some powerful states. Preventing proliferation is problematic under the best of circumstances, and it will be impossible if the nuclear weapon states do not comply with their Article VI obligations. The so-called “bargain” at the heart of the NPT is deeper than any “bargain;” it’s a description of this reality.

The central idea of the NPT is the idea that possession of nuclear weapons is illegitimate for all states – immediately and permanently for all signatories save five, and eventually for them as well. It is a legal expression of the inherent immorality and hence disutility of nuclear weapons.

The next useful fact follows from this as well: nuclear weapons have no military usefulness. Nuclear “deterrence” is a shibboleth, not a strategy. Since this is the primary nuclear justification, the wound here could be made to go deep and in past decades it has. It is not difficult to explain this in common-sense terms.

Finally, nuclear weapons have all kinds of costs, costs not limited to money, and we need to endlessly point these out. Even money, which can be printed, is scarce. These costs are very specific, very real, and very important to everyone.

Why do I say these sources of strength are untapped? Because collectively we act as if we don’t believe in them. Most of the resources, talent, and attention in our field are directed as if these realities didn’t exist.

It is not just because the prime movers of the NGO community are directing resources that way. It is also because we ourselves are not adequately confident. We are influenced by the general atmosphere of helplessness in our culture. We are too greatly mesmerized by the spectacle of events and our darkening national prospects. Too readily do our thoughts, like Hamlet’s, “lose the name of action.”

This is a very grave danger, because it is precisely from liberated imaginations and personal investments that all action and power are born. Faith and belief are not just powerful – they are potentially determinative, holding sway over enormous odds and mountains of passive matter. Faith, but not fantasy, indeed does move mountains.

6. Politics as usual is over; there will be major economic, political, and environmental disruptions from here on out.

U.S. society is in the initial stages of a profound political and economic crisis, beyond anything we have seen or can easily imagine. This is also true worldwide, although some countries and regions, e.g. Europe, may cope somewhat better than others, at least at first. The U.S. situation is poised to rapidly deteriorate for a variety of reasons, many of which are sufficient in themselves and taken together, quite overwhelming.¹⁸

¹⁸ These reasons include emergencies in economics and politics, the global environment, public health, and society.

There is very little any of us can do about what James Howard Kunstler aptly calls “The Long Emergency,”¹⁹ although the timing, depth, nature, and duration of decline are, as they were in other declines, the product of an interplay of forces, including democratic and humane ones.

A silver lining for us is that there will be more awake and motivated persons under these circumstances, if for no other reason than the denial and decadence which holds many back will dissolve. And if we can arrange it, the star of nuclear weapons may fall before our own. To make this happen, our own cultural transmission must be more effective than that in the nuclear complex. Needless to say, our efforts under such circumstances cannot depend upon fads like “messaging” or the latest nonprofit management buzzwords.

We do not need very many people to be successful, provided they are selfless and can attract and lead others. This is a good thing because under rapidly-evolving circumstances of privation, social collapse, and environmental catastrophe there will be no social movement as such for nuclear disarmament, either in the U.S. or internationally – unless nuclear weapons are used in war, in which case *all* bets are off. There could and will likely be a movement for human security which incorporates nuclear disarmament (or disinvestment, which I am saying comes to the same thing in the end).

I think we need just a very few people to harvest the truth, to turn the wheel of truth already established by countless personal sacrifices, clear thought, and humane actions throughout human history. We do not need new norms. We need to use the ones we have. As a dark age dawns, we must learn to take our place in the nonviolent traditions of humanity’s best leaders, traditions which stretch back to the dawn of time. If we do this we have enough people.

Our strategies must not assume too much democracy, a common error. We need and should struggle for more, but we cannot assume we will get it. Indeed, we are very likely to lose much of what we have.

As we begin the “long emergency” we will need, as never before, to stabilize our own lives and at the same time light beacons against the coming dark. Whatever our religious or humanistic tradition, we shall have to adopt the equivalent of the radical Bodhisattva position so we can live and die with dignity, and contribute what embodied hope we can to those around us.

Under these circumstances, nuclear weapons issues, if pursued in isolation, will be increasingly pushed down the “salience ladder” by a chaotic barrage of international, domestic, environmental, economic, and cultural problems which will become increasingly severe in the very near future.

In this environment, in which citizens are hard-beset on many sides, have limited enfranchisement, and are the victims of increasing corruption and violence, a low-salience issue like nuclear disarmament can best be approached as a component of a value- and vision-based platform which a) incorporates broader themes and b) includes specific related issues which affect people directly, sensibly, and negatively. In other words, nuclear disarmament must “piggyback” on related issues to be germane, but there are plenty of them and there will be more.

Arms control, unless it is a minor and subservient theme in the state’s “Global War on Terror” propaganda, a status which it is close to having today, will increasingly fail to attract public awareness, let alone acquire political momentum.

Incremental approaches to disarmament involving highly-crafted, poll-tested “messages” are inherently inadequate in this increasingly unpredictable political environment. The best messages at such a time involve permanent truths, which people already know in the depths of

¹⁹ James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Centuries*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005.

their being. These are invariably moral truths. Fear, it need hardly be said, is worse than useless.

Under these circumstances I do not see dramatic new nuclear arms control treaties coming from international negotiations, barring prior nuclear war. Unless we are very lucky, we may now be entering a much more violent period than the late Cold War, the relative peace and prosperity of which provided the context for the arms control negotiations to which our generation is accustomed.

The Cold War is over, the post-Cold War is over, and we are now in something like “World War IV,” which the U.S. Administration calls “The Long War” or the “Global War on Terror.” It will not be easy to stop this war, intertwined as it is with resource and religious issues. For the neoconservatives, getting this war started, a war which enables so many long-desired changes in our society for them, was an objective in itself, one in which they have now succeeded. We in the “peace and security” community must now grasp that we will never again in our lifetimes have either “peace” or “security” as they are commonly understood.

7. We can make no distinction between local, national, and international strategies.

Nuclear weapons are a global problem, but they exist in, are built in, and commanded from specific places. States claim to own them and direct nuclear activities, but nuclear complexes challenge the sovereignty of nation-states, as many have observed.

For all these reasons and more there are no strictly local, domestic, or international nuclear weapons issues. *To be effective, our strategies must link local, national, and international efforts, drawing what strengths we can from wherever we can find them and applying them to the weakest links in the “nuclear chain of being.”*

It almost goes without saying that the U.S. is the principal barrier to nuclear disarmament worldwide today. The U.S. will block every initiative that could delegitimize nuclear weapons and it has largely abandoned the rule of law in relation to nuclear weapons altogether, making up special cases and special exceptions as it goes. More broadly, the U.S. is also the greatest threat to the rule of law in the world today, the world’s only military “hyperpower,” responsible for approximately half the world’s total military outlays, with hundreds of bases around the world and a perfect willingness to flout international law if deemed necessary and possible.

In all this, U.S. nuclear weapons policy is completely interwoven with its hegemonic ambitions on the one hand and the maintenance of the nuclear complex and contractors on the other. If U.S. “leadership” is to remain intact, the U.S. must cling to its nuclear weapons. If the complex is to remain intact have something to do, and support its politicians, the nuclear stockpile must be re-made with novel weapons.

The U.S. is a now highly decadent empire in steep economic, social, and political decline, still largely oblivious to its own peril and doing little to soften the coming blows. This is a very dangerous situation for the entire world.

Experience and common sense tell us the U.S., *especially under all these circumstances*, will not bow to international pressure or opinion regarding nuclear weapons by any of the means which have been tried up to now in ordinary “international” venues. So whatever the message being crafted for the latest international negotiation or meeting, it seems to me that it’s all been said and done before and will avail little or nothing. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t repeat the message, but without *dramatically* more political power for disarmament, i.e. power *within* key

states parties, which we do not have and have no way of getting *except through work on the ground in those countries*, we cannot expect any breakthroughs.

A central goal of international strategy therefore must be to generate substantial new political power for disarmament *within the U.S.* Barring this, disarmament activism surrounding international negotiations is mostly futile.

Take the United Nations (UN) for instance. Civil society representatives have no real standing and no real power there. The U.N. is a forum of states, not NGOs, after all. While in areas such as human rights NGOs have been encouraged for reasons of state interest to play a higher-profile role, in nuclear weapons policies this is not the case. Nuclear weapons address states existentially, and the low status of disarmament NGOs and indeed of the U.N. Department of Disarmament Affairs itself is a symptom of this reality.

“Floating” international venues, such as the various international NGO conferences which have become fashionable these days, are if anything even more lacking in agency. Compared to similar meetings conducted in nuclear weapons locales like Los Alamos, U.S.A., or Aldermaston, U.K., do such conferences really matter? Wouldn’t the same efforts applied to meetings in locations germane to the issues generate far more power, far more publicity, far more life-changing experiences to young activists, bolster local efforts, and bring to bear significant international pressure on vulnerable points in the nuclear chain? Especially in the U.S., such events could provide a terrific stage from which to proclaim to the world the hypocrisy of U.S. nuclear policies in relation to its demonization of Iran, complicating the political environment for war? When civil society leaders speak on world problems from “neutral” locations, some parts of the world may listen but here in the U.S. we largely do not, and it is, to repeat, the U.S. that is the problem. Conferences located in arbitrary places, disconnected from resistance and constructive action on the ground on the one hand and from national policymaking sites on the other, are for many purposes really situated *nowhere* as far as nuclear issues are concerned. What do they accomplish?

National and international strategies all happen somewhere. To the extent they float in a nebulous “policy space” disconnected from actual nonviolent political power, strategies will be starved of that power. In Washington, DC, to pick one key location, nonviolent political power comes from elsewhere; absolutely none is generated locally. For our purposes, Washington, DC imports political power and then consumes it in the deal-making process. There is never enough, because on the other side of the table is concentrated all the power of the imperial nuclear state. What is the logic of focusing so much of our efforts on the place where we are weakest and our adversary is strongest?

The source of nonviolent political power is people doing things together, which they do in real locations: mostly the places where they live, work, go to church, raise their children, and vote. From the media perspective, these real places produce real images, involve real people, and create real stories, which in the nuclear disarmament business can move from medium-sized city papers to outlets around the world overnight. The bigger point is this: *all politics is local, including national and international politics. The best international and national strategies are local strategies.*

There are thousand variations, but all effective strategies involve one way or another involve the prestige of nuclear weapons, nuclear facilities, and nuclear ideas, and lowering the social and political authority of nuclear spokespersons. All involve raising up instead humane values such as human and environmental security, and reaffirming the authority and status of civil society over the nuclear aberration. The antinuclear forces communicate civilization and

life to themselves and to others; the nuclear weapons forces invariably communicate violence and death. All the other tactical boats – quite a fleet – float upon these waters.

There are no effective international strategies which are not also, and better, local strategies. If we take care of the local strategies, the international strategies will take care of themselves. The opposite is far from true.

8. Live nuclear free: disarmament now!

The trumpet of morning blows in the clouds and through
The sky. It is the visible announced,
It is the more than visible, the more
Than sharp, illustrious scene. The trumpet cries
This is the successor of the invisible.

This is its substitute in stratagems
Of the spirit. This, in sight and memory,
Must take its place, as what is possible
Replaces what is not....

Wallace Stevens, "Credences of Summer," 1947

I want to present this statement as a question, not an answer or injunction, though it carries an exclamation point rather than a question mark. It is an enigma, a mystery. In a way it is the central, enduring mystery of our work.

On the one hand there are so-and-so many nuclear weapons in the world, and nuclear policies are such-and-such. Such things change gradually, we know. We sometimes think they change hardly at all, or they change for the worse. Some day there will be no more nuclear weapons on the planet, but this is no comfort. Some day the sun will explode.

Yet in another sense disarmament can be sudden, even unexpected. How?

Perhaps we should choose only those strategies which are sure to succeed. Since future events are uncertain, and just to be extra sure, maybe we ought to choose strategies which succeed *right now*, and then keep on succeeding. How?

I'm not sure, but it might mean we should commit ourselves wholly to what is true in all places, all times, and for all people, and let go of the rest. Truth is not easy to know, but we are told it will make us free. Will it make us *nuclear free*? "Remember your humanity, and forget the rest," said Sir Joseph Rotblat and his friends. *Forget the rest*? Perhaps that is our clue.

If there is no way to disarmament, disarmament being the way, what is the way? Whatever it is, it must be *our* way, more and more intimately. Most of us have hardly begun to plumb its depths or taste its pleasures.

One of the big problems with professionalized disarmament discourse is that *enactment* and *presentational* truths are generally "missing in action." The "action" itself is usually missing. Professional discourse, abstracted from life, remains there, stunting our efforts until the end of time. We need performance, drama, ritual, and art, not as aesthetic "products" but integrated into everything we do, refreshing and re-creating us.

This might be called "prefiguration" but there is nothing "pre-" about it. To convey the story of nuclear disarmament we must in deed "live nuclear free," placing ourselves into the

story and making it *our* story, well worth telling. We will be changed utterly, but what do we have to lose?

If we construct a dwelling called nuclear disarmament and live there, adding on rooms, planting a garden, others will also build nearby. We'll have neighbors, and the end we seek – nuclear disarmament – will take care of itself. Surely no one will invest in anything which does not benefit them. How *do* others benefit from our work, *now*? We had better ask this question a lot.

How will we remember our humanity? Specific others remind us.

Fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on forever, and each one of you part of it, while many a man's life upon the earth from the earth shall wane.²⁰

Will we see disarmament coming? I doubt it. Hundreds of well-paid professionals in the peace and security community never saw the end of the Soviet Union coming. Revolutionary change is often not only unexpected but disbelieved after it occurs. Even the *possibility* of change is disbelieved, especially by experts. Hannah Arendt:

It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and all origins. Thus, the origin of life from inorganic matter is an infinite improbability of inorganic processes, as is the coming into being of the earth viewed from the standpoint of processes in the universe, or the evolution of human out of animal life. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. With respect to this somebody who is unique it can be said that nobody was there before.²¹

“Reality,” said Wallace Stevens, is the activity of the most august imagination.” This is not a radical subjectivity disengaged from the practical. We cannot, however, neglect the ancient truth that things do look quite different from the inside. Getting inside nuclear disarmament is the trick.

²⁰ William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball and a King's Lesson*.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Univ. Chicago Press, 1958, p. 178.