

THE INALIENABLE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL NUCLEAR POWER: A RECIPE FOR CHAOS

by Alice Slater

The drums of war are sounding yet again. We have seen a flurry of new reports about preparations and rehearsals for a US military strike against Iran to “take out” its nascent bomb making capability, as Iran asserts its inalienable right under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium for “peaceful” nuclear power. As we watch the planned transformation of the imperial US military into a “global strike force”, seeking “full spectrum dominance”, its abhorrent willingness to wage preemptive wars, the recent Nuclear Posture Review that would authorize the use of nuclear weapons even against non-nuclear weapons states, and its designation of so-called “rogue states” as the “axis of evil” we are reaping the grim whirlwind of that policy. We now see North Korea and Iran relying on Article IV of the NPT to develop what is ostensibly described as “peaceful” nuclear technology which would give them the capacity and materials they need to build bombs of their own as a deterrent against US threats.

Article IV of the NPT provides an “inalienable right to peaceful nuclear technology” and was offered as a sweetener to the countries that agreed to sign the treaty and forego the acquisition of nuclear weapons. But “peaceful” nuclear technology is an oxymoron for the 21st Century. The international community had clearly acknowledged that peaceful nuclear technology is a gateway to nuclear weapons proliferation when it required the signatures of 44 “nuclear-capable” nations on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) before the treaty could enter into force.

There are now 440 “peaceful” reactors in 31 countries — all producing deadly bomb materials with 283 research reactors in 56 countries, some producing highly enriched uranium. The signers of the CTBT were well aware that by having a nuclear reactor, a nation had been given the keys to a bomb factory and would need to be included in any effort to ban nuclear tests, regardless of whether they proclaimed any intention to develop weapons. And US CIA Director, George Tenet, said, “The difference between producing low-enriched uranium and weapons-capable high-enriched uranium is only a matter of time and intent, not technology.”¹ There are nearly 2 million kilograms of reactor wastes in the world—with only 5 kilograms needed to make one nuclear bomb. The US is planning to build 50 more reactors by 2020; China plans 30; with 31 more now under construction—to churn out more toxic poisons; on tap for bomb-making, with no known solution to safely containing the tons of nuclear waste that will be generated over the unimaginable 250,000 years it will continue to threaten life on earth.

Countless studies report higher incidences of birth defects, cancer, and genetic mutations in every situation where nuclear technology is employed—whether for war or for “peace.” A National Research Council 2005 study reported that exposure to X-rays and gamma rays, even at low-dose levels, can cause cancer. The committee defined “low-dose” as a range from near zero up to about... 10 times that from a CT scan. “There appears to be no threshold below which exposure can be viewed as harmless,” said NRC panelist, Herbert Abrams, professor emeritus of radiology at Stanford and Harvard universities.² Tens of thousands of tons of nuclear waste accumulate at civilian reactors with no solution for its storage, releasing toxic doses of radioactive waste into our air, water and soil and contaminating our planet and its inhabitants for hundreds of thousands of years.

The industry-dominated IAEA, has been instrumental in covering up the disastrous health effects of the Chernobyl tragedy, understating the number of deaths by attributing only 50 deaths directly to the accident. This was a whitewash of health studies performed by Russia and the Ukraine which estimated thousands of deaths and thousands who suffered thyroid cancer and leukemia as a result of the accident.³ This cover-up was no doubt due to the collusive agreement between the IAEA and the World Health Organization, which provides that if either of the organizations initiates any program or activity in which the other has or may have a substantial interest, the first party shall consult with the other with a view to adjusting the matter by mutual agreement. Thus our scientists and researchers at the WHO are required to have their work vetted by the industry's champion for "peaceful" nuclear technology, the IAEA.

For example, WHO abandoned its original 1961 agenda for research on the basic human health implications of food irradiation. It ceded to the IAEA, whose mission is preserving the nuclear industry not the health of people, the ultimate power of researching the safety of irradiated foods. The IAEA is leading a global campaign to further the legalization, commercialization and consumer acceptance of irradiated foods. "We must confer with experts in the various fields of advertising and psychology to put the public at ease," one IAEA report states, also recommending that the process "should not be required on the label". Yet the NRC study, stating that there is no safe dose of radiation, clearly justified the public's rational fear of radiation. It is time for the IAEA to give up its dual mission in nuclear technology. While the Agency plays an indispensable role in inspecting and verifying compliance with nuclear disarmament agreements, it should not continue to act with a manifest conflict of interest as a shill for the nuclear industry.

Whatever naiveté may have existed in the world about the potential of harnessing nuclear technology for benign purposes, in 1953, when President Eisenhower made his Atoms for Peace speech to the United Nations General Assembly, we can no longer turn a blind eye to the terrifying consequences of the nuclear age. At that time, Eisenhower said:

It is not enough to take this weapon out of the hands of the soldiers. (Would that we could!) It must be put into the hands of those who will know how to strip its military casing and adapt it to the arts of peace. The United States knows that if the fearful trend of atomic military build up can be reversed, this greatest of destructive forces can be developed into a great boon, for the benefit of all mankind. The United States knows that peaceful power from atomic energy is no dream of the future. That capability, already proved, is here--now--today. Who can doubt, if the entire body of the world's scientists and engineers had adequate amounts of fissionable material with which to test and develop their ideas, that this capability would rapidly be transformed into universal, efficient, and economic usage.⁴

Interestingly, in Eisenhower's famous farewell address, in which he warned the country of the military-industrial complex, in a little noted aside, he also cautioned, presciently, against the abuse of the science, warning that:

[I]n holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive

of a scientific-technological elite. It is the task of statesmanship to mold, to balance, and to integrate these and other forces, new and old, within the principles of our democratic system -- ever aiming toward the supreme goals of our free society.⁵

Can there be any doubt that the “scientific-technological” elite at Los Alamos and Livermore Laboratory have been driving the nuclear arms race, squandering lost opportunities for nuclear disarmament since the end of the Cold War, and developing new untested weapons designs that create the need for more tests which are used as an excuse to block US ratification of the Test Ban Treaty?

What does it take for a country to be willing to inflict the toxic assault of nuclear waste on its own people in light of the lessons we have learned during the past 60 years of the nuclear age? One delegate at the disastrous Non-Proliferation Treaty Review last spring, shared quite frankly, at an NGO panel that his country was unwilling to forego its “inalienable right” under the treaty because their scientists wouldn't want to be left behind in state of the art knowledge. They need to play in the major leagues of science with the big boys. So despite the promise of clean, safe abundant energy from the sun, the wind, the tides, many non-nuclear weapons states have underscored their equal rights to the dark fruits of nuclear technology. Will this kind of scientific machismo, which has created so many gruesome chapters in world history be supported at the expense of the health of so many people and of the very survival of our biosphere? Will we satisfy our scientists' dangerous thirst for knowledge and status despite the obvious possibility that the peaceful nuclear reactor can readily be converted to a bomb factory?

The nuclear crisis we face today is a direct result of the export of peaceful nuclear technology to countries such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Indeed, every nuclear reactor enables a country to develop its own nuclear weapons, as we have seen in the case of India, Pakistan, and Israel, who never joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Under the guise of "peace", other countries, such as South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, and Libya were also well on their way to developing nuclear bombs, which they later abandoned.

IAEA Director, Mohammed ElBaradei recently stated "We just cannot continue business as usual that every country can build its own factories for separating plutonium or enriching uranium. Then we are really talking about 30, 40 countries sitting on the fence with a nuclear weapons capability that could be converted into a nuclear weapon in a matter of months." ⁶

The current flurry of negotiations and the move to try to control the production of the civilian nuclear fuel cycle in one central place, as proposed by El Baradei simply will not fly. It would be just another discriminatory aspect of the NPT, creating yet another class of haves and have-nots under the treaty, as was done with those permitted to have nuclear weapons and those who are not. Now it is proposed that some nations be permitted to make their own nuclear fuel, while others, such as Iran and North Korea, would be precluded from doing so. And in the wake of the stern warnings to Iran, and the referral of the issue to the Security Council, which has provoked Iran to begin reprocessing of nuclear fuel under its “inalienable” right, the US has incomprehensibly announced its Global Nuclear Energy Partnership to control the spread of nuclear materials in which “supplier” nations would manufacture nuclear fuel rods, ship it to other countries, by rail, road, and sea, to use in their reactors and then take back the irradiated

fuel and reprocess it, breaking a 30 year taboo in the US on turning irradiated reactor fuel into weapons-grade material. Brazil too, recently announced its intention to get into the action, by proclaiming that it is weeks away from firing up a major uranium enrichment plant. ⁷

We think we can control the atom while in reality we have been pushing our luck since 1945 when we unleashed its awful power and created jerry-built structures to contain its terrifying consequences. As more countries acquire nuclear power, against a backdrop of unauthorized preemptive war to strike at “rogue” nuclear weapons—the nuclear phantoms are chasing us—we imagine them where they aren't and fail to see them under our very noses; or we deliberately turn a blind eye for geopolitical reasons or commercial greed. Trying to exercise control over the reprocessing and distribution of nuclear fuels, would be like going down the same path we've been on for the last 50 some-odd years for nuclear arms control. Do you think France, Japan, or the US, for example, will surrender control of nuclear materials production, any more than the nuclear powers have surrendered control of atom bombs? It would be a long drawn-out effort with discriminatory rules in the end—when, instead, we could be expending our energy and intellectual treasure on shifting the energy paradigm to make nuclear and fossil fuel obsolete.

But there are corporation which don't want to lose their ability to continue to profit from the human misery caused by nuclear and fossil fuels. The sun, the wind, the tides, and geothermal energy are here in abundance for all the world's people and they are **free**. We already have the technology to harness the bounty of the earth. And we know how to store it when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow, by using hydrogen fuel cells. It is clearly not beyond our financial means, as argued by the corporate supporters of toxic fuel industries—particularly when you compare the costs of clean, safe energy to the more than two hundred billion dollars spent annually to subsidize fossil and nuclear fuels, while renewable energies receive less than a tenth of that amount world wide.⁸ Not to mention the cost of war to protect those poisonous energy sources, or even the military infrastructure and naval operations operating during peacetime, on guard duty for the oil tankers plying the seas with their noxious cargo.

So why don't we have a ten-year crash program to achieve a nuclear, fossil-free, and biomass-free energy transition? Because of the forces that insist on peddling their polluting and proliferating sources of energy--their "cash cows". Once the infrastructure is in for the sun, wind, tides, and geothermal, there will be nothing to sell. It would probably be the best way to end poverty on the planet as well--since poor countries can get free, clean earth energy, abundantly available, and will not have to spend their meager budgets for their critical power needs. We need new thinking and it has to start with us—ordinary people who have no corporate interest in perpetuating disastrous forms of energy on the planet. We mustn't buy into the propaganda that clean safe energy is decades away or too costly. There are mountains of evidence that those statements are falsehoods deliberately expounded by corporate interests to keep their profits coming and to oil the war machine. And don't be fooled by industry deceptions about how “clean” nuclear power is carbon free. Fossil fuel is used in every step of the process of creating these standing bomb factories—from the mining, milling, and reprocessing of uranium to the decommissioning of aging plants and the transporting and storing of nuclear waste. ⁹

If, as we work to phase in safe, clean energy, eliminating the evil twin of nuclear weapons, so-called “peaceful” nuclear technology, as we continue to press ahead for weapons abolition, we’ll have a real road map to a nuclear free world. Otherwise, I fear we are not dealing with a full deck and are doomed to failure in two ways--halting nuclear weapons proliferation and saving our planet from the ravages of climate change caused by the massive carbon releases into our atmosphere.

It’s time to support a protocol to the NPT calling for the establishment of an International Sustainable Energy Fund, and begin to shift massive subsidies and tax breaks for the development of the abundant energy of our earth from the sun, wind, tides, and geothermal sources. Whoever heard of a terrorist attacking a windmill? Article IV would become obsolete, just as Article V, which provides for “peaceful” nuclear explosions has been rendered inoperative by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which forbids nuclear explosions of any kind. Clean safe energy is available to us now. We have the technology. We need to be vigilant in providing the ample evidence in its favor to counter the corporate forces arguing that it’s not ready, it’s years away, its too expensive--arguments made by companies in the business of producing dirty fuel. Here’s what Franklin Delano Roosevelt had to say about similar forces in 1936:

We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace, business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob.¹⁰

What are the prospects for establishing an International Sustainable Energy Agency? Last spring more than 40,000 people marched in Central Park calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons on the eve of the failed 2000 NPT Review. More than 1,000 people came from Japan and we had over 40 Hibakusha—survivors of the terrible destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have launched their Mayors for Peace Campaign calling for negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons to be completed in 2010 with complete dismantlement by 2020. Abolition 2000, a global network of over 2000 organizations in more than 90 countries is working with the Mayors and the newly formed Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament for a treaty to abolish nuclear weapons. It has drafted a model nuclear weapons convention which is now an official UN document.

Abolition 2000 recognized “the inextricable link” between nuclear weapons and nuclear power in its 1995 founding statement and has drafted a model statute for the establishment of an International Sustainable Energy Fund. The statute is supported by the NGO energy caucus at the Commission for Sustainable Development and we will be working at the 2006-2007 CSD, which will be addressing energy, to promote its adoption by a friendly government. The Government of Sweden has announced its intention to rely completely on sustainable energy in the next 15 years as it phases out its existing nuclear power plants.¹¹ Germany has issued a call to work with like-minded countries to amend the NPT to recognize the right to clean, safe energy as a human right and to establish an International Renewable Energy Agency which would be added as a protocol to the NPT. The Global Alliance for the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons and Power in

Space is working with grassroots groups all over the world to support the Chinese and Russian annual initiatives to keep weapons out of space which the US has repeatedly blocked. The Norwegian Ministry of Finance has excluded seven companies from their Government Pension Fund because they are involved in the production of nuclear weapons. A new Abolition 2000 Working Group has been established to work on a divestment strategy. Another Abolition 2000 Working Group is campaigning to get US nuclear weapons out of Europe where more than 400 US weapons are deployed in NATO countries. Working with the Mayors and Parliamentarians, the Belgian Senate has passed a resolution calling for the removal of US nukes from NATO. Next year, a massive demonstration is being organized by the women of the UK at Faslane in Scotland to protest the rebuilding of the Trident submarine arsenals in England. Following the example of the women of Greenham Commons whose 19 year protest and encampment resulted in the removal of NATO's nuclear tipped Cruise missiles from the UK, we expect this to be a great civil action that will serve to create a breach in the armor of the nuclear powers, beginning with the UK.

This past fall, led by Canada and Mexico, a group of middle power nations nearly succeeded in establishing ad hoc committees in the Committee for Disarmament in Geneva to begin discussions on nuclear disarmament and a space treaty. Under enormous pressure from the US, they withdrew their proposal, but promised to follow through next fall if there is no progress. The Middle Powers Initiative is supporting this process and other potential avenues to break the disarmament deadlock with its newly formed Article VI Forum. There is a burgeoning grassroots movement for nuclear abolition. But all elements must be addressed. If we do not firmly reject the new American drive to empire and maintain the heavens for peace, if we do not at the same time phase out nuclear power, but rather think that we can continue to control this leaking sieve in a discriminatory regime, we will find ourselves in a state of perpetual war with little chance for a lasting and peaceful nuclear-free world.

¹ http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2004/tenet_testimony_03092004.html

² <http://cisac.stanford.edu/news/611/>

³ "Rethinking Nuclear Energy and Democracy After September 11, 2001", IPPNW Global Health Watch Report Number 4, 2004.

⁴ <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/Deterrence/Atomsforpeace.shtml>

⁵ <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/indust.html>

⁶ (Agence France Press, Feb. 23, 2005)

⁷ www.realcities.com/mi/kriwashington/13842944.htm

⁸ www.sonoma.edu/users/f/freidel/global/372gelbspan1.htm

⁹ www.greatchange.org/bb-thermochemical-nuclear_sustainability_rev.pdf

¹⁰ <http://history.acusd.edu/gen/text/us/fdr1936.html>

¹¹ AP, 2/7/06