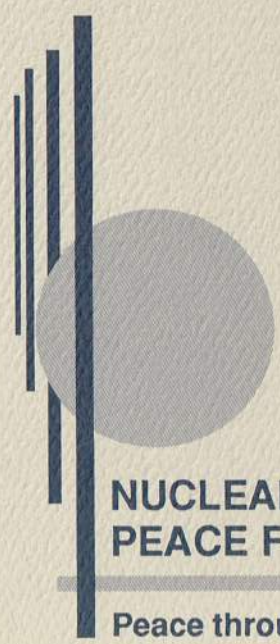
ENDING THE TYRANNY OF THE ARMS RACE: A PEACE CONVERSION PROGRAM

by

Larry Agran
Mayor of Irvine, California

Booklet 23

WAGING PEACE SERIES



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WAGING PEACE SERIES

As far as is known, the term "Waging Peace" originated with Warren Wells, late husband of Ethel Wells of Santa Barbara, in a letter to President Eisenhower. It was a long-standing practice of Mr. Wells to keep in close touch with key national figures and give them his views on peace issues as well as other vital matters. This series is dedicated both as a memorial to him and in gratitude to Mrs. Wells for her continued efforts in this cause.

Just as peace is more than the absence of war, waging peace is more than supporting arms reductions. In addition, it embraces positive steps toward genuine harmony. In this series the Foundation publishes and distributes short booklets stressing ideas for attaining peace. Concepts expressed will include views of many authorities, and will not necessarily be those of the Foundation.

Suggestions for topics and your reactions to this issue are welcome. Booklets in this series are available from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

NUCLEAR AGE PEACE FOUNDATION
1187 Coast Village Road, Suite 123
Santa Barbara, CA 93108

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Published by the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
First Printing, February 1990

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INTRODUCTION

The winds of change are blowing throughout the world leaving dramatic alterations in the geo-political landscape. At a breathtaking pace, changes have occurred in Eastern Europe that seemed impossible to achieve within our lifetimes. The Soviet Union's domination and control of the Eastern European countries has been largely replaced by self-determination. This has resulted in an end to the communist party monopoly in these nations. Democratic elections with opposition parties participating and prevailing are characterizing the region. The new spirit in the region is symbolized by the opening of the Berlin Wall, and the jubilant celebrations of the East and West Berliners.

Much if not all of this change has been made possible by the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. In Gorbachev, the Soviets have a leader who has combined vision with pragmatism; a leader who has embraced change rather than resist it with force of arms; a leader espousing the virtues of openness (glasnost) and restructuring (perestroika). Gorbachev has called for major reductions in armaments and troops, and has unilaterally initiated cutbacks.

The new freedom in Eastern Europe, the leadership of Gorbachev and positive changes in the Soviet Union itself, create a significant opportunity to reorder our priorities to meet civilian needs rather than military - industrial greed. In this issue of **Waging Peace**, Larry Agran, the Mayor of Irvine, California, calls for a major reduction in the U. S. defense budget. He outlines a plan that would provide for national security by meeting not only our legitimate defense needs, but also our health care, housing, transportation, educational and environmental needs.

A study recently reported that men in Harlem have a lower life expectancy than men in Bangladesh. Such findings, indeed such conditions, are unworthy of a great nation. Just as the Soviets have been restructuring their society, we must restructure ours toward greater equity, opportunity and compassion. As Mayor Agran suggests, we must "take a stand *against* mindless military spending and *for* progressive social, economic, and environmental policies." The time is now for reordering our national priorities.

David Krieger
President
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

ENDING THE TYRANNY OF THE ARMS RACE: A PEACE CONVERSION PROGRAM

by Larry Agran

It used to be that few American mayors dared to speak publicly about foreign policy issues and the damaging effects of military spending. We were told that these were matters of "national security" — off-limits to all Americans, except for a tiny handful of highly placed federal officials. Fortunately, with the advent of a new generation of urban leaders, things are changing now. Mayors worry about national security too.

But to us, national security means more than weapons — more than Star Wars and MX missiles and Stealth bombers. To us, national security means strong families and strong neighborhoods in economically vibrant communities. It means rewarding jobs in modern industries that are competitive in the global marketplace. It means health care, education, child care, and transportation worthy of our citizens. It means decent, affordable housing for every American. It means safe streets in *every* part of town, so that people can walk at night without fear. It means clean air and clean water and land free of poisons. In short, national security means cities that are good places to live in a country that is a good place to live, on a planet that is a good place to live.

THE TYRANNY OF THE ARMS RACE

Measured in these terms, our national security has been breached. Our cities and our people are under siege. The enemy is an uncontrolled arms race that has, since 1947, consumed **$10 trillion** in American wealth — a figure that defies comprehension. Beginning with President Truman — and led and supported by every president and every Congress since — our national politicians have built the kind of military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned us against. In the process they've relentlessly drained our cities of the tax dollars and the intellectual resources essential to urban progress, to national progress, and to global progress.

Once thought affordable, even desirable as an economic stimulus, here is what the wretched arms race has come to: Driven by nuclear weapons testing and development, America's share of the $900 billion per year global arms race now exceeds $300 billion. The true price of our

twisted federal priorities is painfully evident in our cities and towns, where our streets and bridges crumble; where our factories rust; where our school children remain mired in ignorance; where displaced farm families seek refuge; and where drug addiction, violence, homelessness, hunger, and poverty are on the rise. What we see in our cities is, in fact, what is going on globally: Our economic systems, our social systems, and our ecosystems are bending and even breaking under the burden of an arms race that is nothing short of tyranny.

A THREE POINT PROGRAM

Faced with the tyranny of the arms race, some of us have not hesitated to call for radical change, for revolutionary change, for fundamental reordering of our public priorities. What, then, is the new order of things that we seek? We seek to bring about what we call "peace conversion," and our program consists of three essential elements. The first element is genuine superpower disarmament — not simply arms control agreements that, in effect, lock in massive weapons expenditures — but deep cuts in both nuclear and conventional forces. Preferably, these are achieved as bilateral agreements with the Soviets. But even in the absence of Soviet agreement, it is in our self-interest to restructure our largely offensive military forces into truly defensive forces, permitting enormous annual savings of $200 billion or more, while actually enhancing global security and our own national security.

The second element of our peace conversion program is to capitalize on the massive liberation of resources associated with superpower disarmament in order to achieve urgent domestic goals — an end to further federal debt accumulation, and swift victory over homelessness, hunger, poverty, and pervasive environmental degradation.

The third element of our program is to apply some of the liberated resources — at least $40 billion per year — to address the global environmental emergency we face, including global warming, ozone depletion, and the related problems of Third World debt, Third World impoverishment, and population growth.

If you're inclined to say that "peace conversion" is a nice idea but an unrealistic one, I ask you to reconsider. Isn't the plain truth just the opposite? It seems to me that the course we're on now — pursuing a disastrous arms race — is what's totally unrealistic. We simply can't go on like this, at least not for long. I say this as a citizen, but also as a practical politician who is experienced in the nuts-and-bolts realities of governing a community. It's not really very complicated. We know what it takes to run a decent city. We know what it costs to secure a liveable environment. We know that if you spend money on all the wrong things, you won't have

what it takes to do the right things. That's what budgets are all about. And that's why I want to describe to you the sort of post-Cold War peace conversion budget that I proposed to the U.S. House of Representatives' Budget Committee in 1987.

A BUDGET FOR "DEFENSIVE DEFENSE"

In my testimony to the House Budget Committee, I said that the continuing burden of a bloated military budget was, in fact, ruining America and ruining our planet; that the most urgent task before the country was to cut the $300 billion military budget by at least half.

I told the Committee how it could be done, pointing to four areas rich in cost-cutting potential. **First**, I said, let's do what **everyone** but the military contractors and some corrupt Members of Congress agree must be done — let's eliminate the flagrant waste, fraud, and abuse that infects the entire weapons procurement system. The savings: $30 billion to $50 billion per year. That's not my estimate. It was David Stockman, President Reagan's first director of the Office of Management and Budget, who asserted as early as 1981 that the Pentagon was awash in fraud and abuse accounting for as much as $30 billion each year. More recently, Robert Costello, the Pentagon's director of procurement, noted that 30 percent of the Pentagon's $150 billion procurement budget is wasted every year. How do you eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse of such magnitude? You do it the way we do it with any program at City Hall that is out of control. We take away the money, we fire the rotten managers, and we replace them with new managers whose success is measured not by the size of their bloated budgets but by their ability to do more with a lot less.

Second, I told the House Budget Committee that the time is here — in fact it arrived long ago — to get rid of offensive weapons and doctrines. The idea that we deter the Soviets by our ability to launch a first-strike nuclear attack is just plain stupid. We curb the appetite of a potential aggressor by communicating our resolve to *defend* rather than to attack. This means our tax dollars devoted to armaments should be spent only on truly defensive weapons — weapons that will repel an attack, such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft equipment, and short-range jet fighters. These weapons provide real defense and do so at a tiny fraction of what offensive weapons cost. A truly defensive strategy would, at last, allow us to erase a host of costly and obviously offensive weapons programs: the multi-billion dollar MX missile with its idiotic railroad car basing scheme; nuclear aircraft carriers, each costing billions to build and billions more to operate; the B-2 or Stealth bomber, slated to cost some $68 billion for 132 planes that will likely be as useless as their predecessors, B-1 bombers costing $28 billion; the Trident II/D-5 submarine, a $100

billion investment in shameless first-strike overkill; and, of course, Star Wars, which is truly the Strategic **Offensive** Initiative, now costing us at least $5 billion per year, with an ultimate price tag that may reach $1 trillion before the pseudo-scientists obsessed with this fantasy ever admit that erecting a shield against nuclear weapons is impossible.

Third, I told the House Budget Committee that it's time to completely re-think and revamp our military alliances. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is now over forty years old. If a Soviet invasion of Western Europe was ever a realistic threat, it would surely have to be regarded now as among the most unlikely manifestations of any resurgent aggressiveness on the part of the Soviet Union. If this is so, why are we continuing to spend $150 billion per year on the militarization of Western Europe? Amazingly, the United States taxpayers, most of them living in decaying cities and towns, continue to fund two-thirds of all NATO costs. This means the average American family is taxed $2000 per year to support the NATO countries, whose aggregate population and wealth exceed our own. Let me put it simply: No one has a greater interest in the security of Western Europe than the Western Europeans themselves. It's time they assume the full measure of their own defense. Accordingly, it's time for us to phase down our annual support of NATO to no more than $30 billion, saving us some $120 billion per year.

Similarly, it's time for the Japanese and South Koreans to pay the costs of their own defense — costs that have been running us at least $25 billion per year. And in the Persian Gulf, we spend $50 billion per year for huge naval armadas, a Rapid Deployment Force, and a series of difficult and dangerous missions which, at their bottom line, are simply intended to maintain access to Mideast oil reserves. The answer to all this is to once-and-for-all end our dependence on foreign oil through imposition of an oil import fee that will, to a certainty, produce both revenue and conservation measures that assure our energy security and free us of the need to risk war abroad in order to stay warm at home.

Fourth, and finally, I told the Committee that we must get serious about banishing nuclear weapons. Let's accept the Soviets standing offer to stop nuclear testing right now. Let's negotiate early and deep nuclear arms cuts with the Soviets. Let's recognize what war planners acknowledged decades ago — that 500 nuclear bombs, not the 50,000 we and the Soviets possess — are more than enough to meet the requirements of any credible theory of mutual nuclear deterrence.

As for the building of yet more nuclear bombs, no mayor and no citizen who cares at all about protecting the public health and safety can possibly condone this kind of continuing madness. As the *New York Times* has reported in dozens of front-page stories, the government's bomb-builders have knowingly and secretly poisoned the air, water, and land

of entire communities with radioactive wastes whose lethal properties persist for up to 280,000 years, more than 50 times the span of all recorded human history. Those who seriously suggest we ought to spend yet another $20 billion or so to quickly re-open the now-closed bomb factories in South Carolina, Texas, Ohio, Colorado, and Washington, must be truly insane.

Admittedly, to younger Americans who have known nothing but Cold War, getting rid of nearly all nuclear weapons, getting rid of offensive weapons, making our allies pay their own way, and pulling the plug on criminal military contractors may sound like a radical course. Certainly, the budgetary impacts of such policies are radically different and radically beneficial — saving us a least $150 - $200 billion per year in military outlays. Instead of a wildly excessive ***military*** budget of $300 billion per year, we'd finally have an honest-to-God ***defense*** budget of about $100 billion per year. That's more than ample to protect the lives and property of the American people — just as the Constitution requires; but it's not enought to get us involved in undeclared wars in places like Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, the Carribean, and Central America — just as the Constitution forbids.

In point of fact, what I'm proposing here is what thoughtful military analysts are calling **"defensive defense"** or Common Security. And it's precisely what President Franklin Roosevelt had in mind in 1941 when, in his famous Four Freedoms speech, he defined the Fourth Freedom as "freedom from fear — which," he said, "translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor — anywhere in the world."

REALLOCATING OUR RESOURCES

Nearly 50 years after President Roosevelt articulated this Fourth Freedom, isn't it time we secured its benefits for ourselves and all humankind? As I often ask my fellow mayors to do, just take a few minutes to imagine what it would mean if we actually achieved a post-Cold War peace conversion budget, with $200 billion per year liberated for purposes of social uplift. For the record, speaking as one American mayor, here's what I'd do with these resources.

First, I'd set aside about $15 billion per year for what I call a **"Defense Worker's Bill of Rights"** — to see to it that those civilians who have worked in weapons factories for years are provided a guarantee of income, alternative employment opportunities, and whatever education and retraining may be necessary. We want no victims of the post-Cold War peace we envision. We want all Americans to be winners.

Second, I'd urge that we invest $50 billion per year to complete our social security program — making it a truly Comprehensive Social Security Act that guarantees to each and every American income security, health security, housing security, and nutrition security. Today, thirty-three million Americans are officially impoverished; poverty is smothering 13 million kids; one in every five newborns is poor, two in five if they're black; as many as 3 million Americans are homeless; tens of millions are without adequate medical care. It is absolutely immoral that all this human suffering is permitted to continue in a $5 trillion economy — a national economy of unprecedented aggregate abundance. **Let the slogan of every mayor and every citizen be this: No more needless suffering!**

Third, as a mayor familiar with the wonderful work that can be done with adequate resources at the local level, I'd urge the reactivation and enlargement of the General Revenue Sharing program, this time making $20 billion available annually to the cities and towns of American to **rebuild transit systems and libraries, and to provide parks and recreation opportunities, as well as police, fire, and emergency services that can once again render our streets and our communities safe.** Along with America's half million other local elected officials, I say to the President and the Congress: Restore our resources and we'll do the job! Give us back our dollars and we'll once again make America's cities repositories of civilization, culture, and progress.

Fourth, I'd heed the recommendation of the U.S. Conference of Mayors that $12 billion per year be invested in **federal aid to education.** This amount would permit school districts **across America to hire 387,000 additional teachers**, teachers' aides, and support staff. Class sizes could be cut ten percent. And both teachers and kids alike would be given the fighting chance they deserve to make our education system work again.

Fifth, I'd insist that an added $40 billion per year be set aside **to meet the global environmental and developmental emergencies that we face.** The list of environmental horrors is well known — drought and planetary warming, record ozone levels on the streets of our cities, a huge hole in the stratospheric ozone layer, medical wastes washing ashore, toxic wastes oozing out of the ground, acid rain and dying lakes and diminishing rain forests. Who now can doubt that the Earth itself is seriously wounded? Step by step, working with other countries and working through the United Nations too, we must heal and restore the Earth. There is no other way. Also, in an act of humility and common sense, **we must invest the billions it requires to restrain the growth of our own species, adopting non-coercive but comprehensive and effective birth control policies.**

According to the Worldwatch Institute's Lester Brown and Edward Wolf, to put our global community on a path of sustainable development, it will cost an average of about $100 billion per year over the next five years. With the fair-share contributions of other nations and with the steady application of these resources through the year 2000, we would be able to protect the topsoil on croplands; we would reforest the Earth; we would dramatically slow population growth; we would become energy efficient and develop renewable energy; and we would retire Third World debt.

Julius Nyerere, the distinguished former President of Tanzania, spoke for the poor of the world when he asked: "Must we starve our children to pay our debts?" As Americans, our answer to hunderd of millions of suffering children, and their desperate parents, must be clear and unequivocal. No, we will no longer permit 40,000 children to die of starvation and malnutrition each day. We will, instead, hammer our swords into ploughshares, and we will at last begin to redeem the future for our planet. Once free of the arms race, we will surely reach these goals. Without an end to the arms race, we will surely fail.

Sixth, and last, the kind of post-Cold War peace conversion budget I'm talking about is so rich in liberated resources that we can do more than overcome decades of social neglect; we can do more than restart the entire world on a path toward sustainable development; we can also eliminate — completely eliminate — the annual federal budget deficits that threaten to impoverish future generations.

So there you have it — one mayor's agenda for America. An end to the Cold War. A genuine structure of defense to accompany substantial military disarmament. And a budget we can live with — indeed, a balanced budget that will usher in a revolution of productive priorities at every level of society — locally, nationally, and globally.

CONFRONTING THE MORAL CRISIS OF MILITARISM

Isn't this a future worth struggling to achieve? If it is — if you agree that the case for fundamentally changed priorities is a powerful one, the question then logically arises: How do we get from here to there? How do we achieve a post-Cold War peace conversion budget? The answer, I think, is that we who say we wish to lead — America's mayors, America's educators, America's citizen-activists — must over and over again speak the truth about what we see. **And the truth is that we cannot possibly do our jobs to provide for the health, welfare, and safety of our citizens under the tyranny of current federal priorities.**

But simply speaking this fundamental truth isn't enough. We

must ***challenge*** each and every American with this truth. I've learned from experience that mayoral speeches, pronoucements, and press conferences are not enough, on their own, to change things. I believe as leaders we must go further and actually challenge the citizens we represent to choose what kind of city, what kind of country, and what kind of world they want. As Americans, the vast majority of us are good at making choices **provided we have real choices to make.** That's what democratic self-government is all about.

As the mayor of a militarily dependent community, I ask the citizens who elected me to look beyond our share of the $3 billion in prime military contracts that come to Orange County each year. I ask them to consider the choices. "What's more important for America and for the world," I ask, "maintaining a Rapid Deployment Force of doubtful military value, or building rapid transit systems and other energy-efficient transportation improvements that will allow us to overcome our worst-in-the-nation traffic problems while reducing our demand for fossil fuels?"

- What's more important? Producing more nerve gas, more weapons-grade plutonium, and more hydrogen bombs — at a cost of more than $10 billion per year? Or reforesting the Earth at half the annual cost?

- What's more important? Building Stealth bombers? Or channeling their $68 billion cost into a trust fund to develop renewable energy resources?

- What's more important? Pouring at least $5 billion per year into Star Wars research? Or using that same amount of money to provide comprehensive family planning services, not just in America, but worldwide?

These are not abstract questions of choice. What's at stake here is nothing less than the moral basis for governance in the late 20th century. A generation ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it this way: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." Dr. King understood that Americans had to make a moral choice because America was — and is — in moral crisis. The moral crisis we face — a continuing militarism that destoys us spiritually just as it bankrupts us financially — is a crisis every bit as acute as the tyranny that caused the American Independence movement of the 18th Century; or the enslavement of African Americans that caused the Abolitionist movement of the 19th Century; or the outrage of segregation that caused the Civil Rights movement of the 20th Century.

The moral crisis of militarism cannot be resolved by compromise any more than colonialism, slavery, and segregation were susceptible to compromise. We cannot compromise with the Cold Warriors who still hold the Republican Party in their grip. Nor can we compromise with the Congressional Democrats — many of them self-described liberals who say they agree with our goals but who counsel caution in cutting the Pentagon budget for fear that the Democratic Party be perceived as "weak on defense." Never mind that a Democratic Party still endorsing Cold War military budgets is weak on urban policy, weak on education, weak on health, weak on environmental protection; it's just plain weak on everything that counts.

We must reject suggestions from any quarter that we be content with a "leveling off" of the military budget at $300 billion per year, or perhaps achieving a $1 billion or $2 billion cut here or there. This is what Dr. King called the "tranquilizing drug of gradualism" — and we should have none of it.

Who, then, are our friends in this matter of reordering national priorities? There are many. We have some in Congress, especially within the Black Caucus whose Members have developed a detailed alternative military budget that cuts well over $50 billion in its first year. Outside of Congress, we have friends by the thousands who are mayors and city councilmembers and school trustees — all unafraid as local elected officials to take a stand ***against*** mindless military spending and for progressive social, economic, and environmental policies. And most important, we count among our friends the majority of Americans who are ready for a dramatic change of course. They are ready because they know it's time. Deep in their hearts they know it's time to forever end hunger, homelessness, poverty, and environmental degradation — not just in America but throughout the world. And they sense that all this is possible if we acknowledge and welcome the new global reality: **The Cold War is breaking up, and an historic opportunity is at hand to sweep its debris aside, build America anew, restore the Earth, and rediscover the power and the glory of democratic self-government.**

THE AUTHOR

Larry Agran, an attorney, is the Mayor of Irvine, California. He has served as executive director of the Local Elected Officials Project of the Center for Innovative Diplomacy since 1983, and is a senior editor of the *Bulletin of Municipal Foreign Policy.*

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