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 will distribute short booklets stressing ideas for attaining peace. Some publications will be scholarly, others more popular in style—most will combine elements of both. 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. Quantity lots are available at minimal charge from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

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

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First printing, April, 1986
Second printing, September, 1987

NO FIRST USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

by

Dietrich Fischer

WAGING PEACE SERIES

Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
INTRODUCTION

At the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation we are developing a strategy for peace in the nuclear age. We are convinced that there is no simple nor magic solution to achieving and maintaining peace. Rather, peace is a product of a dynamic equilibrium—a balance of forces, needs, attitudes and aspirations. Peace requires a willingness to use self-restraint and a harnessing of power because it is perceived to be beneficial (that is, self-restraint must be understood to satisfy self-interest).

A starting point for building a strategy for peace in the nuclear age is clearly understanding that the use of nuclear weapons is likely to be suicidal. All of the great military leaders of the Second World War understood this, but none more clearly than Douglas MacArthur. In his speech before the joint session of the Congress of the Philippines on July 5, 1961 MacArthur stated: “Global war has become a Frankenstein to destroy both sides. No longer is it a weapon of adventure—the shortcut to international power. If you lose, you are annihilated. If you win, you stand only to lose. No longer does it possess even the chance of the winner of a duel. It contains now only the germ of double suicide.”

MacArthur went on to conclude: “We are in a new era. The old methods and solutions no longer suffice. We must have new thoughts, new ideas, new concepts. We must break out of the straitjacket of the past. We must have sufficient imagination and courage to translate the universal wish for peace—which is rapidly becoming a universal necessity—into actuality.”

In this issue of Waging Peace Dietrich Fischer discusses the concept of no first use of nuclear weapons. The basic premise is that if all nuclear weapons powers agree not to use
nuclear weapons first, then nuclear war will never be deliberately initiated. But, you may question, what if a leader of a nuclear weapons power lies, and only says he will not use nuclear weapons first with no intention of keeping his word? Fischer deals with this question by pointing out that a credible policy of no first use will entail a strategy of "transarmament," that is, a shift from offensive to defensive armaments. He makes a convincing argument that transarmament is a "unilateral step that increases common security." The ultimate reason that a no first use policy will be adhered to is that it provides a strong incentive to the other side not to use their weapons first.

Most Americans believe that the United States already has a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, but we do not. We are still pursuing the development and enhancement of offensive weapons systems with a first strike potential. And we continue to rely for defense on nuclear rather than conventional forces in Europe and Korea. The threat of use of nuclear weapons is an extremely dangerous game which could lead to disaster. A policy of no first use based on self-interest and transarmament could provide a needed buffer while agreements are being achieved to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons.

Once again, your understanding of this issue, and active involvement in the educational and political processes of our democracy are essential elements toward achieving peace and real security in the nuclear age. We would welcome your comments on this issue of Waging Peace.

David Krieger
President
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NO FIRST USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS*

According to a recent opinion poll, (1) 81 percent of the American people believe that the United States' policy is never to use nuclear weapons first (and 4 percent are unsure). The vast majority, 76 percent against 19 percent, strongly support a policy of no first use. (2) (A remarkably sizable minority, 33 against 62 percent, even advocate that the United States should never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances, not even in retaliation against a nuclear attack.) (3) However, it has long been official U.S. policy to resort to the first use of nuclear weapons, if deemed necessary, in case of a conventional attack in places such as Europe or Korea.

NATO commander General Bernard Rogers has written: "The basis of NATO's military planning is security through credible deterrence. There must be clearly perceived linkages among conventional, theater and strategic nuclear legs of NATO's triad of forces in order to maintain an incalculable risk for any aggressor. Should aggression occur, the Alliance would conduct a forward defense of NATO territory, responding as necessary with direct defense, deliberate escalation, and general nuclear release, to keep the level of violence consistent with maintaining the territorial integrity of all NATO members." (4)

Some even advocate that nuclear weapons should be used early in a battle. For example, when a member of the U.S. State Department said at a conference in 1981 that if NATO were facing defeat in a conventional war in Europe, it might have to resort to the first use of nuclear weapons, he was criticized by an American officer assigned to NATO, who replied that this was not true—NATO would not wait until it was losing! Nuclear weapons formed an integral part of NATO's arsenal and in case of a war they would be used right from the outset.
This brief essay critically examines some of the arguments that have been made against a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons.

The idea of no first use has a long history. In 1958, Carl Friedrich von Weizsaecker argued: If I have for my defense only a weapon that kills me at the same time as the attacker, it can deter someone who wants to kill me, since in that case I might as well use my weapon, if only to drag him to death along with me. But if someone intends to steal my briefcase, he will not be deterred, since no one is going to blow himself up for the sake of his briefcase. (5) In 1962, Helmut Schmidt, who later became Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, wrote: "Successful defense [must be] possible without resort to nuclear weapons...unless the enemy launches his attack to the accompaniment of nuclear weapons." (6) In 1963, Robert C. Tucker and Richard A. Falk argued in favor of no first use. (7) Tucker pointed out that the United States maintained the same policy, for example, with regard to poison gas. In 1972, Richard H. Ullman stressed that a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons could be adopted unilaterally, since in case of a war it would automatically put pressure on an opponent to follow the same policy, regardless of what he might have declared. (8)

A policy of no first use began to be debated widely when four high ranking former U.S. government officials advocated it in a famous article in Foreign Affairs in Spring 1982. (9) They advocated a gradual strengthening of the conventional defense capabilities of NATO so that Western Europe could defend itself against a potential Soviet invasion without resort to first use of nuclear weapons. They were also concerned that internal disagreement about the policy of using nuclear weapons first could cause strains within NATO and weaken it.

In June 1982, the Soviet Union made a unilateral declaration before the United Nations Second Special Session on Disarmament that it would never be the first to use nuclear weapons, and it invited other nuclear armed nations to do the same. China has declared that it would never be the first to use nuclear weapons ever since it first tested a nuclear bomb in 1964.

If all nuclear powers were to adhere to a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, and would also effectively prevent their accidental use, there would never be any nuclear war.

So far, the United States, Great Britain and France have refused to make any such pledge. Three reasons for this position have been advanced: (1) NATO is inferior to the Warsaw Pact in terms of conventional military strength and therefore must rely on the threat of using nuclear weapons first to deter a conventional Soviet attack on Western Europe; relying on a purely conventional defense against conventional aggression would be too expensive; (2) a no first use pledge would be a meaningless propaganda exercise and an opponent would not rely on it in any case; and (3) even if the Soviet Union signed a mutual no first use agreement, we could not trust that it would respect it in case of war. These three reasons will be examined here in turn.

STRENGTHENING CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE

There is little doubt that the threat to use nuclear weapons first, if it is believed, makes a deliberate conventional attack by a potential aggressor less likely. But if it fails to deter war, the result may be the total destruction of both sides. It is as if someone tried to deter burglary by packing his own house full of explosives and putting a trip wire around it that would automatically blow up the house in case an unauthorized intruder tried to approach it. This would kill the burglar, but of course also the people living in the house. There exist better methods to prevent burglary, such as having police patrols or good locks. Similarly, an adequate conventional defense is far preferable to prevent conventional aggression than a threat to commit nuclear suicide.
Former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has criticized the strategy of “flexible response” which seeks to deter a conventional attack on NATO by threatening the first use of battlefield nuclear weapons. If the Soviet Union reciprocated, the United States would escalate to an exchange of strategic nuclear weapons. McNamara wrote: “The ultimate sanction...the launch of strategic nuclear weapons against the Soviet homeland...would be an act of suicide...One cannot build a credible deterrent on an incredible action...Nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatsoever. They are totally useless—except only to deter one’s opponent from using them.” (10)

Even the possession of a monopoly on nuclear weapons does not always deter conventional aggression. Stalin initiated the blockade of Berlin in 1948 when the United States was the only country in the world to possess any nuclear weapons. And the British nuclear submarines did not deter the Argentine military Junta from invading the Falkland Islands/Malvinas in 1982. A threat to use nuclear weapons first might be considered by an opponent to be merely a bluff. In that case, we face the dilemma of either capitulating or escalating to nuclear war.

Even more dangerous than an open threat to use nuclear weapons first is to adopt such a policy without publicly announcing it. This would be a scenario for Dr. Strangelove. In that film, the Soviet Union had secretly built a doomsday machine, which would automatically destroy the whole world if the Soviet Union suffered a nuclear attack. Since the Soviet government failed to announce this measure in time (it wanted to wait until the next party congress), the machine failed to deter an attack and the world was destroyed.

Far preferable to a threat of using nuclear weapons first is to deter conventional aggression with an adequate conventional defense. Such a deterrent is more credible, because it is not suicidal.

To deter aggression, it is not necessarily to have military superiority over an opponent, nor to have numerical equivalence in all weapons categories. All that is necessary is to make aggression so costly compared to the benefits an aggressor might expect to gain, that it does not appear worthwhile. The armies of Sweden and Switzerland were clearly inferior to the German army during the Second World War. Yet they were able to dissuade a German invasion, because their defense was sufficiently strong relative to the small advantage that Hitler might have hoped to gain from occupying them. They also deliberately sought to minimize the potential gains of an aggressor by preparing to paralyze their industries and refuse cooperation with a foreign occupation force. (11) Similarly, Yugoslavia was able to dissuade Stalin from a military intervention in 1948, when it broke with Moscow politically, because it was prepared to fight a long partisan war in case of a foreign occupation. McGeorge Bundy writes: “Those who think that either political will or less-than-nuclear strength is unimportant in such matters will find instruction in considering the record of Yugoslavia under Tito. If Tito could stave off the Soviet Union, must NATO fail?” (12)

Would it be too expensive for NATO to shift to a purely conventional defense against conventional aggression? Even if it was more expensive, a clear majority of the American public would be willing to pay more. Sixty-six percent against 25 percent said that they were willing to pay higher taxes if the United States and the Soviet Union sharply reduced their nuclear weapons, but replaced them with more expensive non-nuclear forces. (13)

Deliberate escalation to a nuclear war would be suicidal. Thus, if survival is at stake, cost considerations must become secondary. But in reality, a strong conventional defense is not more expensive than relying on nuclear weapons. The only two countries in Europe that stayed out of the Second World War were Sweden and Switzerland. They maintain a very strong conventional defense with mandatory military service for all adult males, and have lower military budgets.
than all of the nuclear armed nations. As a fraction of GNP, military expenditures in 1982 were 2.0 percent in Switzerland, 3.3 percent in Sweden, 4.2 percent for France, 5.1 percent for the United Kingdom, 6.4 percent for the United States, 7.1 percent for China, and 15 percent for the Soviet Union (according to U.S. government estimates). (14) This refutes a claim that a credible conventional defense is economically unattainable.

**TRANSARMAMENT**

It is important to make a distinction between conventional offensive and defensive forces. Offensive forces can be used to carry out aggression, whereas purely defensive forces can only be used to prevent aggression. For example, tanks with long range mobility can be used to invade territory and are therefore offensive. Antitank weapons in fixed positions can only be used to stop an invasion and are therefore defensive. Only conventional defensive forces should be strengthened to help prevent war. Increasing offensive capabilities can on the contrary precipitate the outbreak of war, as will be illustrated.

NATO is currently debating the adoption of the strategic concept called “Air Land Battle 2000.” It calls for counterattacks deep into Eastern Europe in case of a conventional attack on Western Europe. It calls for highly mechanized forces that can rapidly penetrate across a border, and for conventional rockets that can destroy follow-up forces and supply lines inside Eastern Europe. While a greater reliance on conventional rather than nuclear weapons is desirable, building more conventional offensive arms is the wrong answer. It could lead to the rapid escalation of a small border incident into a big war. Let us consider how this might happen.

The Soviet Union has announced a similar strategy. It has stated that since it has been invaded from the West three times in this century, if there was another war in Europe, it would make every effort to prevent the war being fought on its own soil. In case of an invasion, it would bring rapid reinforcements to push the fighting back across the border. If both sides adopt such a “forward” defense with the aim to have any fighting take place on the other side of the border, the situation is highly explosive. A little spark, a mere accident, could start World War III.

Imagine, for example, that an American helicopter strays inadvertently into East Germany and is shot down. The crew survives and the United States demands their immediate release. The Soviet Union detains them and announces it will hold a public trial. The United States sends a rescue mission to free the crew. The rescue team encounters armed resistance. A tank column is sent into East Germany to assist the rescue team. Soviet tanks push the column back into West Germany and occupy some Western territory near the border. NATO sets into motion the Air Land Battle doctrine and attacks supply lines inside East Germany, while pushing the invasion force back into Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union and its allies stage a general mobilization, and World War III has begun.

This scenario may appear far-fetched and unrealistic. But as long as both sides maintain a strategy of escalating fighting once it has begun, there are numerous ways a war could start. If there is a war, both sides usually claim, and often believe, that the other side has started it. There is always something that the other side did first. For example, in the Mideast war of 1967, Israel maintains that Egypt started the war when it blocked Israeli vessels’ access to the Bay of Aqaba. Egypt maintains that Israel started the war when it subsequently bombed Egyptian airfields. In order to stop a war rapidly if it should ever break out, it is important to adopt a policy that helps deescalate the fighting.

One way to deescalate war if it should ever start is to maintain a strong defense, while deliberately avoiding offensive capabilities. For example, in the scenario above, if NATO had plenty of antitank and antiaircraft weapons in fixed positions along the central front in Europe, the Soviet
Union could not advance into NATO territory. New precision-guided munitions can offer an advantage to the defender. If NATO also deliberately limited its tank and bomber forces which might be able to carry out offensive operations, the Soviet Union would see no need to push across the border out of fear that otherwise it might be attacked. Therefore it is in NATO's own interest not to be misperceived as a threat to the security of the Warsaw Pact nations. (The same applies in reverse.) The best way to convince an opponent that we have purely defensive aims is not to build offensive capabilities in the first place. What we cannot do, we certainly will not do.

A shift from offensive to defensive arms is neither armament, nor disarmament, but can be called transarmament. (This term is sometimes also used to denote a shift from military to nonmilitary forms of defense.) Transarmament has the advantage that it can be undertaken unilaterally, without risk. Whereas unilateral disarmament would weaken our security and thus possibly invite aggression, transarmament reduces the danger of war and therefore increases the security of both sides, even if only one side makes a move. It is a unilateral step that increases common security. Unlike mutual disarmament, it need not wait for the successful outcome of lengthy negotiations. Kenneth Boulding once remarked that agreement is a scarce resource, and if we can improve the situation without depending on agreement, we should not wait.

Is the strategic defense initiative (SDI, or "star wars") a form of transarmament, a shift from offensive to defensive arms? It may appear so on the surface, but it is in fact the opposite. While a defense against nuclear missiles alone would threaten no one, a combination of offensive missiles with a defensive shield is even more threatening than nuclear missiles alone. If one side possesses nuclear missiles but is vulnerable to retaliation, it would be totally irrational to use those missiles first and invite suicide. In that situation, the only sensible purpose of these missiles is to deter a potential opponent from using nuclear weapons. But if a country is protected against nuclear missiles (or merely believes, falsely, that it is protected), it can then threaten to use its nuclear weapons first, without fear of retaliation. This is why the United States is so afraid that the Soviet Union could gain an advantage with strategic defense. For the same reason, we must understand why the Soviet Union is so afraid of SDI. A combination of nuclear weapons with defense against retaliation is an extremely offensive system. Proceeding with SDI would therefore inevitably lead to a further spiral in the arms race.

RESTRUCTURING NUCLEAR FORCES

The second argument that has been made against a no first use policy is that such a promise would be meaningless. James Schlesinger, defense secretary in the Ford Administration, when asked why the United States had not declared that it would never be the first to use nuclear weapons, replied that in case of a war, in the heat of battle, nobody would want to rely on any such promise made by an opponent. Therefore there was no use in making such a pledge.

It is, of course, true that a mere promise cannot be relied on. But this does not mean that a policy of no first use is therefore worthless. It only means that it must be made more convincing than through a mere pledge. The nuclear arsenals themselves must be restructured in such a way that a first use would never make any military sense, but that retaliation against a nuclear attack would remain possible, even after suffering a first strike.

A distinction is made between "first use" of one or a few nuclear weapons ("to show resolve") and a "first strike" which seeks to cripple the military potential of the opponent by destroying his nuclear weapons in a surprise attack. A limited first use would not necessarily remain limited, but could easily escalate to full-scale nuclear war. There is no guarantee that one side would capitulate as long as it still possessed nuclear weapons.
In order to deter a nuclear attack, two things must be made clear to a potential aggressor: (1) if he uses nuclear weapons, he faces retaliation, and (2) as long as he does not use them, he faces no danger of being attacked with nuclear weapons. This has two implications for the design of missiles for nuclear deterrence: (1) a sufficient number must be able to survive an attack so that retaliation remains possible, and (2) we must deliberately avoid building nuclear missiles in such large numbers and of such accuracy that they pose a threat to the survival of the opponent’s missiles.

There is widespread agreement on the first condition. But the second condition, which is equally important, often seems to be ignored by today’s strategic planners, on both sides. The United States and the Soviet Union both have developed highly accurate missiles with multiple warheads (MIRVs, Multiple Independently-targetable Reentry Vehicles) that can destroy an opponent’s nuclear missiles in their silos. But building such missiles makes sense only if they are intended for a first strike. Destroying an empty silo after its missile has been fired is militarily useless.

Building such missiles as the MX or the Soviet SS-18 which are vulnerable, in fixed positions, but at the same time pose an enormous threat to the other side, contribute nothing to deterrence. They undermine deterrence. Instead of signalling to an opponent “don’t attack us with nuclear weapons or else you face the threat of retaliation” they give the reverse signal: “If you don’t destroy these missiles you face a constant threat; if you destroy them, which is easy, you face a reduced threat.” Giving such signals, even if unintended, is imprudent, to say the least.

Such a scenario has already precipitated a war, fortunately involving only conventional weapons. In 1967, both Israel and Egypt possessed vulnerable bomber fleets on open desert airfields. Each side knew that whoever struck first could destroy the opponent’s fleet on the ground before it could take off. This was a highly volatile situation. When war appeared imminent, Israel did not want to take a chance and wait until the Egyptian air force might attack. It wiped out most of the Egyptian bombers on the ground in a surprise attack.

The most important step in a credible no first use policy is not to build first strike weapons. If our nuclear weapons are incapable of destroying an opponent’s nuclear weapons, he will know that it would make no sense for us to use them first, and he will therefore not be tempted to seek to destroy our nuclear weapons out of fear of a surprise attack. If we also make our nuclear weapons survivable, the opponent will not dare to use his nuclear weapons first, regardless of whether he has officially announced such a policy or not.

PROVIDING INCENTIVES FOR COOPERATION

The third argument that has been made against a policy of no first use is that we could not trust the Russians to adhere to their side of such a bargain. But it is not necessary to trust the Russians. A no first use policy is not something that we adopt as a favor for the Soviet Union, in return for a reciprocal favor. A no first use policy serves our own interests.

If we adhere to no first use, and make it credible, we provide a strong incentive for the Soviet Union not to use their nuclear weapons either. If they are afraid that during a war we might resort to the use of nuclear weapons at any moment, this would put them under strong temptation to seek to destroy our nuclear weapons in a sneak attack. They might do so not in the expectation of “gaining” anything (which would clearly be an illusion), but rather out of fear of suffering even greater losses if we attack first. If we make it clear that we would never attack first, that indeed it would make no sense for us to do so, then we provide no incentive for the Soviet Union either to attack first during an acute international crisis.

An opponent will keep an agreement if it is in his or her interest to keep it. An American businessman who sells
grain to the Soviet Union replied to the question whether he could trust the Russians to live up to contracts: “We do not trust their good will. When we write a contract, we write it in such a way that they would hurt their own interests if they broke it. We trust their self-interest.”

Sometimes, we need not wait to negotiate any mutual agreement, but can take unilateral steps that reduce the danger of war, in our own interest. A NATO officer once proclaimed with deep conviction that it made sense to talk about confidence-building measures only if both sides were ready to adopt them. Clearly, it is preferable if both sides adopt such measures. But even if only one side instills greater confidence, it can improve its own security. For example, at the beginning of the Second World War, Switzerland unilaterally reaffirmed its policy of armed neutrality, that it would defend itself with all available means if attacked, but would not join the fighting unless it was attacked first. If it had waited for a reciprocal declaration of neutrality from Hitler Germany, it would have waited in vain, to its own disadvantage.

A recent computer simulation study (15) has shown that the most effective strategies for eliciting cooperation from an opponent in a “prisoners’ dilemma” game had the following four properties in common: (1) they never initiated hostility, (2) they did not accept hostile behavior passively but retaliated, (3) they did not retaliate excessively but were ready to cooperate again as soon as the other side did, and (4) they were simple and clear, so that an opponent knew what he was facing, and was not left guessing. These principles seem applicable to a far wider variety of situations.

Another application of these principles is a policy of “no first intervention.” (16) We should announce to the Soviet Union that we will not intervene militarily in any third country as long as they will not. If we allow trouble spots all over the world to draw us into war, whether in allied countries or adversaries, we will constantly risk escalation to a larger war. Do we want to hand over the responsibility of

whether our country is at war or peace to any small dictator? Allowing other countries to draw us into war is comparable to connecting a powderkeg to dozens of fuses, any one of which can go off at any moment. This is not a “security” policy but a national insecurity policy.

Initiating hostile behavior tends to backfire. To keep peace, it is not sufficient to make war disastrous for a potential opponent. It is equally important to make peace as attractive as possible. If we seek to make the present situation unbearable for an opponent, this reduces his incentive to keep such a peace. A secret U.S. defense guidance plan advocated fighting “an economic and technical war on the Soviet Union...as a peace time complement to military strategy.” (17) Such a policy deters peace, not war.

During the big debate in 1969 whether or not to build an antiballistic missile system, the argument was made that it was not technically feasible to build a defense against Soviet missiles, but this was not so important. The Soviet leadership was relatively reasonable and reliable. The great danger was the Chinese, they were so fanatic and unpredictable. Most important was to build a defense against Chinese nuclear missiles. Today we are hardly afraid of a Chinese nuclear attack, but not because of any antiballistic missile system. It is because we have normal relations with China. There are over 13,000 Chinese students in the United States, and many Americans visit China. Mutually beneficial relations are the best foundation of security.

If we are perceived as a threat to the security of other countries, to the extent that they wish we would disappear from the face of the earth, and if they have the means to make us disappear, we are not very secure. On the contrary, to be secure, we should see to it that we are so useful to them, preferably even indispensable, that they would be very disappointed if we did disappear.
WHAT WE CAN DO

Before a patient accepts a therapy, he must become aware that he is ill. But it is not enough to frighten him. He must also be offered hope. He must be shown that a therapy exists that works.

This implies a strategy for change: We must recognize the danger we face, and help others to recognize it, too. But we must not limit ourselves to criticizing existing policies. We must go beyond that and propose feasible, persuasive alternatives.

The vast majority, even among highly educated people, who believe that it is the United States' official policy never to use nuclear weapons first, must be made aware that this is not now our policy. Since there is already overwhelming support for such a policy, it should be possible to build a strong movement in favor of it. We must show that no first use of nuclear weapons is not a sacrifice on our part that we make in favor of the Soviet Union. It is an elementary measure for self-preservation.

We can write or call our elected officials to let them know of our concerns. Rather than writing an angry letter, it will be more effective to write a supportive letter when they have made a step in the right direction, asking them to go further. We can write to local newspapers, and talk to our friends and colleagues. We can join one of the many organizations working to create a safer world. (18)

We may sometimes hesitate for fear that we do not know enough technical details to participate in a discussion about defense policy. But the fundamental questions do not involve technical details about specific weapons systems, but rather an understanding of human nature, of how conflicts escalate and how they can be resolved without war. In that respect, all of us can equally contribute, whether we have access to classified information or not.

People who rise to positions of top leadership are not always representative of the average citizen. Those who have an unusually strong desire to exert influence over others and to dominate have a better than average chance to seek positions of leadership. But they are not always the best qualified to lead. (Of course, there exist many notable exceptions.) Some of our leaders are more interested in exerting power than the public at large is. If we leave it to such people alone to determine our foreign and defense policy, we may be led onto a dangerous course. If we, as citizens, do not take part in discussing these questions, certain people in leadership positions may be only too eager to decide for us, not necessarily the way we would have wished. It is our responsibility to speak up, or else we will never be heard.

We can point out that true security results from mutually beneficial cooperation in such areas as trade, scientific and cultural cooperation. We share many common problems with the Soviet Union which we can better resolve if we work together. We can search together for a cure to cancer and other diseases, can develop together new sources of energy, can jointly explore outer space. We need not put blind trust into anyone, but we can explore what gives other countries an incentive to cooperate with us. Intimidating others is not likely to lead them to cooperate.

Some people believe that if we sufficiently frighten the Soviet leadership by building ever more nuclear weapons and threatening their first use, we can force them into making concessions. But the Soviet response may instead be a further buildup of their own nuclear arsenal, so that they could not be forced to give in. The situation resembles the game of "chicken" that is sometimes played by teenagers with automobiles. Two competitors drive toward one another at full speed. The one who swerves aside first to avoid a collision is the "chicken" who loses face among the gang. The one who is more daring and drives straight through is the winner. But if neither of them swerves in time, both are dead. Threatening the first use of nuclear
weapons is comparable to playing a game of “nuclear chicken.” But our leaders may tend to forget that they are not alone playing this game. And as Kenneth Boulding has remarked, “when you drive a schoolbus, you don’t play chicken.”

A policy of no first use of nuclear weapons is a relatively modest measure. But it is urgently needed. Initiating a nuclear war would be suicidal. Even the threat to escalate to nuclear war, without actually implementing it, could be suicidal, because it tends to invite a nuclear attack from an opponent in case of a conventional war or a serious international crisis.

A no first use policy is only a small, but essential first step toward a safer world. It is an immediately feasible measure that can give us some breathing space to implement more far-reaching changes in the world political system that have become necessary with the invention of nuclear weapons.

Continued reliance on nuclear deterrence is too risky. In John Kennedy’s words, it is like Damocles’ sword hanging constantly on a thin thread over all of our heads. The tragic explosion of the space shuttle Challenger with seven astronauts on board has vividly reminded us again that anything that can go wrong, ultimately will. Our fate resembles that of those astronauts, except that we are not volunteers.

Defense against nuclear weapons is impossible. Preparations to fight and “win” a nuclear war are insane. Even total nuclear disarmament, as difficult as it may appear, would not be sufficient, as long as nations continued to settle their disputes through war. Each side would be tempted to build nuclear weapons again in case of war, out of fear that the other side could do so first.

To guarantee human survival in the nuclear age, it has become necessary to eliminate war itself as an accepted human institution. Many say this is utopian. But to people living in earlier periods, the abolition of cannibalism, slavery, absolute monarchy, or colonialism appeared equally utopian. Yet those institutions have been changed. With determination and combined efforts, we can also eliminate war.

Seeing the enormous sums available to build weapons for war, and the modest resources available for peace efforts, we may be tempted to become gloomy. But we should not forget that during the last century the slave traders and slave owners made huge fortunes, while the people who fought for the abolition of slavery made personal sacrifices. Yet they prevailed in the end, because they were right. In the same way, the forces working for peace can ultimately prevail.
NOTES

*I wish to thank McGeorge Bundy for helpful suggestions.


2. Ibid., p. 113.

3. Ibid., p. 118.


SUGGESTED READING


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