

Christian Peacemaking: Eliminating the Nuclear Scandal Part I

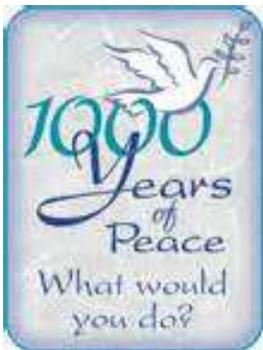


Second Vatican Council

The horror and perversity of war is immensely magnified by the addition of scientific weapons. For acts of war involving these weapons can inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction, thus going far beyond the bounds of legitimate defense. Indeed, if the kind of instruments which can now be found in the armories of the great nations were to be employed to their fullest, an almost total and altogether reciprocal slaughter of each side by the other would follow, not to mention the widespread devastation that would take place in the world and the deadly after effects that would be spawned by the use of weapons of this kind.

All these considerations compel us to undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude.(1) The men of our time must realize that they will have to give a somber reckoning of their deeds of war for the course of the future will depend greatly on the decisions they make today.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965, #80



Now that the Cold War is over nuclear weapons are no longer the issue, it's the environment.

These words were uttered to me by one of my teaching colleagues in 1991, the year the Soviet Union ceased to exist. I felt these words were wrong but many people believed them. For thirty years I spent much of my educational and pastoral ministry in confronting the issues of war and peace, especially as it deals with nuclear weapons. Much of my training had to do with history, foreign policy studies, moral theology and related studies that led me, since 1979, to spend considerable time writing, teaching and working with groups to shape U.S. nuclear policy. I worked with groups such as, Witness for Disarmament, Pax Christi, SANE/Freeze and as a researcher at the United Nations for SANE/Freeze on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This year we commemorate the beginning of the First World War in 1914. The optimism that characterized European culture collapsed on the fields of the Somme, Verdun, Passchendaele and so many untold battlefields. This reminds us that we are all charged with doing all we can to create a world where such carnage is never again visited on the human race.

With the fall of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, one could feel a physical release of the tensions that had plagued the world for the past half century. So many people felt that all the fear of a nuclear war had finally come to an end. Many were a bit naïve about all of this for the weapons themselves are still part of the arsenals of the United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, France, Israel, North Korea, Israel, India and Pakistan, with the prospects that 15-20 nations could build such weapons if they deemed it necessary.

Great apprehension surrounds this issue because of the covert nuclear program of Iran. We have, as some maintain, entered the *Second Nuclear Age*. I had come to a time in my ministry when I felt it was time to turn my attention elsewhere, after all; one tires of looking into the nuclear abyss, but I never really could leave it behind me. Something always brought this matter back to my attention and concern. With the challenges facing us in this new nuclear age I decided to re-engage the issue. After all, a deacon is called to do what he can to be a peacemaker and to invest time and energy to that end.



In April 24 - 25, 2014, a colloquium was held at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana entitled, *Revitalizing Catholic Engagement on Nuclear Disarmament*. The participants included forty Catholic bishops, policy specialists, Catholic scholars, and students gathered to explore ways to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Among some of the more notable persons attending were former U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz, former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, moral theologians Rev. Bryan Hehir, and Rev. Kenneth Himes, O.F.M., and a number of scientists involved with nuclear weapons research.



The proceedings were chaired by the Reverend John L. Jenkins, C.S.C., President of the University of Notre Dame. The overall rationale of the gathering was directed toward re-energizing the moral and policy discussion in the Catholic community at large and, more specifically, among the U.S. Catholic Bishops concerning nuclear weapons. One of the chief aims of the discussions was to provoke the U.S. Catholic Bishops to re-examine their *provisional* acceptance of nuclear deterrence. This provisional acceptance of deterrence was formally issued by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in its pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, in 1983.

Essentially deterrence means dissuasion of a potential adversary from initiating an attack or conflict, often by the threat of unacceptable retaliatory damage. Pope John Paul II makes this statement about the morality of deterrence: 'In current conditions 'deterrence' based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable. Nonetheless, in order to ensure peace, it is indispensable not to be satisfied with this minimum, which is always susceptible to the real danger of explosion.'

The pastoral letter was issued by the U.S. Catholic Bishops at a time when U.S./Soviet relations were approaching a dangerous crossroads. In 1980, the Carter administration published Presidential Directive 59, calling for the development of fighting limited, protracted, and general nuclear war that would result in the United States winning such wars. This was formulated in the context of a whole new generation of highly accurate nuclear delivery systems and warheads being developed by the United States to effectuate such plans. Such weapons included the MX missile, the Pershing II missile, ground, sea and air launched cruise missiles, the Trident D-5

submarine launched missile, B-1 and B-2 bombers etc.... These developments, and the bellicose rhetoric and nuclear build-up of the early years of the Reagan Administration, led to increasing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union that many felt could lead to war. It was in this context that the U.S. Catholic Bishops brought moral reasoning to bear on the whole question of nuclear deterrence and war-fighting.



B-2 Bomber

The U.S. Bishops stated their position that any use of nuclear weapons, no matter how remote the location, could not guarantee that such use would not lead to rapid escalation into global nuclear war.

We do not perceive any situation in which the deliberate initiation of nuclear warfare on however restricted a scale can be morally justified. Nonnuclear attacks by another state must be resisted by other than nuclear means. Therefore, a serious moral obligation exists to develop non-nuclear defensive strategies as rapidly as possible.

The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, 1983 USCCB

As such, they called for non-use of such weapons and the reduction and elimination of such forces from the world. However, the bishops also knew that such an effort would take time and a shift in human consciousness to eventually lead to elimination of these weapons. As a result, they gave provisional moral acceptance to the existence of nuclear deterrence so long as good faith efforts were made toward progressive reduction and elimination of these weapons.

To date, we can take some comfort that over 50% of the world's nuclear weapons that existed in 1983 have been eliminated. However, as is obvious we still have a long way to go. The United States has stated policy and practices that ensure a nuclear weapons force to the year 2060. Of course, such a policy is the product of the very complicated and frustrating political process of creating *confidence building measures* and *monitoring protocols* that would prevent what strategists call *nuclear break out* by rogue or other nuclear nations from any treaty obligations and commence building these weapons overtly or covertly. Also, the knowledge to build these weapons cannot be erased and so the danger that a nation would covertly develop such weapons remains a problem for the international community. It also leads other nations to build their own small arsenals to deter other nuclear states from aggressive action against them. One begins to see the quandary nations are in.

Nations are also confronted with, what political theorist of the *political realism* school note, the nature of international relations. They note that it is difficult to really assess with any certainty what a possible adversary's intentions are regarding the structure of military forces and their possible employment for aggressive purposes. This is the classic situation that political realists call the *security dilemma*. This security dilemma is the result of an international environment where there is no supranational authority to control nations. As a consequence, each nation must provide for its own security knowing that other nations may not help it to resist aggression. In the process of providing for its own defense other nations may view such a measure as aggressive in nature and they will respond by building forces that they deem essential for security. Upon seeing this development the nation that began to build up its military forces to begin with will respond by building more forces to counter the build-up in other nations and then we are off to the arms races!

Consequently, the United States will not eliminate all its nuclear weapons systems unless iron-clad measures could be developed to ensure absolute elimination of nuclear weapons from the world. However, some would argue that this is a merely locking in U.S. conventional military superiority, and/or making the world safe again for global conventional war. Smaller nations find nuclear weapons attractive because they keep the *big guys* at bay. When the Minister of Defense of India was asked what the first Persian Gulf War communicated to other nations, he responded: *If you are going to challenge the United States you have to have nuclear weapons.* Obviously, not the message the United States intended to send to the world community. Political Scientist and nuclear strategist Dr. Paul Bracken puts it this way:



....Distrust of the United States has also fueled the spread of the bomb as a counter to American military interventions. China, Russia, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Iran hardly desire a world that is safe for U.S. strong arm tactics with conventional forces. In their eyes, the bomb counters America precisely because it is so risky. Because if there's one thing the bomb does, it increases the risks in any military showdown, with the prospect of a large increase in the level of violence. This suits many countries just fine. It's exactly what they want, given that they can't possibly compete against the United States in conventional technologies.¹



India's Angi (Fire) IV nuclear missile

Another variable that complicates nuclear elimination is the possible possession of these weapons by *non-state actors* such as, terrorist groups, political extremists, and those groups who wish to change the status quo in some manner benefitting their political cause. If the materials for making these weapons are not stored and guarded, it is certain they will fall into the wrong hands—and indeed this has already happened. Of course, in this situation deterrence is extremely weak because such groups are not necessarily a part of a nation-state and it may be difficult to assess *attribution* or *who just hit us with that thing* in order to retaliate. In effect, how would such groups be deterred from such action, especially if they seek martyrdom?

For the U.S. Catholic Bishops it may be time to discuss whether or not the provisional acceptance of nuclear deterrence is still an acceptable moral option. In the abstract it is not for one cannot threaten to do evil without it being evil. Yet, the technical reality of these weapons makes deterrence a fact and not simply a policy or moral choice. Yet, Catholic teaching must provoke such a discussion.



Pope John XXIII

Noting that Pope John XXIII's encyclical "Pacem in Terris," issued 51 years ago and just six months after the Cuban missile crisis, declared that "the arms race should cease" and that "all come to agreement on a fitting program of disarmament," Father Jenkins said that the canonization of the two pontiffs would encourage the United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops and others working to revitalize the Church's engagement in nuclear disarmament. He called the canonizations on Sunday "fortuitous timing, as we can surely use more high-placed opponents of nuclear weapons to hear our prayers and intercede for us." He added: "As bishops and popes have been saying for decades, nuclear weapons are morally tolerable only for the purpose of nuclear deterrence, and even then, only as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament. This narrow moral justification for nuclear weapons is based, in part, on the belief that deterrence will indeed deter, and that ... is an increasingly uncertain assumption."

(cf. Bishops, Notre Dame and Other Universities encouraged by Shultz, Perry, and Nunn commit to revitalizing Catholic engagement on nuclear disarmament, Paul Browne)



But what kind of rationale is deterrence based on? Firstly, as mentioned above it is not so much a policy as it is a technical reality. The mere possession of nuclear weapons by rival or potentially rival states *de facto* creates deterrence. One is deterred from using nuclear weapons in war because of the devastating consequences to one's own nation by the retaliating nuclear nation. It does not really matter how few an adversary has, if they can deliver just one of these weapons on a major city this is usually enough to deter—though there is no guarantee. Secondly, it must be stated with clarity that deterrence is effective so long as all parties share the same *cost-benefit* perception about the use of nuclear weapons. For instance, should one party see that use of these weapons is of more benefit than facing national extinction (for instance in the case of the survival of Israel), than all bets may be off and deterrence fails. But this leads us to the questions, why would a nation choose to go to war in the first place, and what would deter a nation from doing so?

1. Wars are often caused by states that actively seek to expand their influence, whether out of imperialistic motives or out of what their leaders see as legitimate dissatisfactions with the *status quo* (expansion).

2. These states act as a function of opportunity, that is, when the expected net benefits of mounting a challenge to the *status quo* exceeds the expected costs of overcoming other states' defenses (opportunity). Defenders of the *status quo* must raise the costs of challenging it to an unacceptable level. The following three propositions indicate ways of doing this:

2a. Deterrence is stronger when a state has the capability to impose great costs on a potential attacker (capability).

2b. Deterrence is stronger when a state is committed to respond to an attack by imposing such costs (commitment).

2c. Deterrence is more effective when a state's commitments are clearly communicated (communication).²

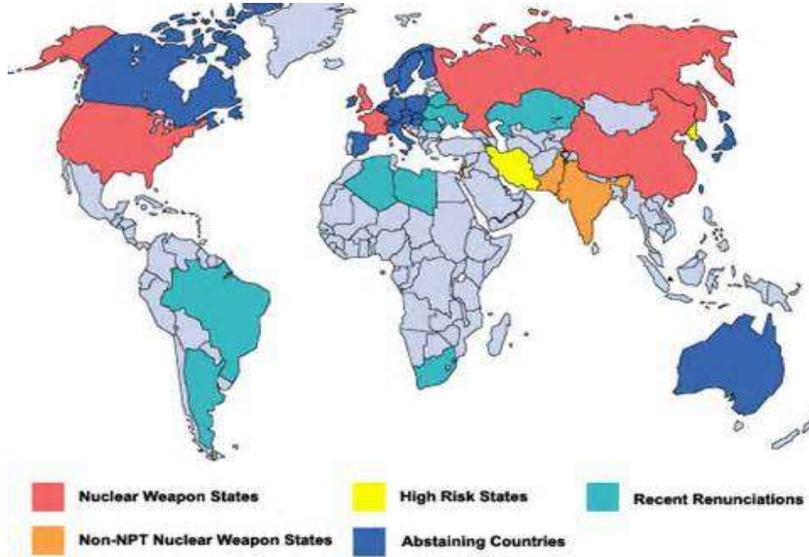


U.N. Security Council, October 1962

In all of this is one ever-present reality, deterrence works only if everyone plays along and by the rules. This cannot be guaranteed especially if a nation's vital interests are at stake and they are willing to gamble or, in the words of former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, *pull the Temple down on their own heads*, as evidenced during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 when Cuban President Fidel Castro pushed for the Soviet Union to launch its nuclear missiles in Cuba against the United States, with the assured outcome that the United States would have annihilated Cuba and the Soviet Union in retaliation. So we can understand the call of people such as, George Schultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn for a re-examination of the U.S. Catholic Bishop provisional moral acceptance of deterrence.

Father Jenkins said, "In revitalizing the Catholic voice on nuclear weapons, there is, I believe, a special role for Catholic universities," adding that they can, working with the bishops, "combine the richness of the broad ethical framework of Catholicism with scholarly expertise in international relations, political science, physics, peace building and many other areas to contribute to the collaboration among Catholic bishops, academics from non-Catholic universities and national security experts ... This cannot be just a single meeting; it must be the launch of a multi-year effort. The University of Notre Dame will be a committed partner in this effort with the bishops' conference, Boston College, Georgetown, the [Nuclear Threat Initiative](#) and distinguished statesmen, such as Secretary Schultz and Secretary Perry." I pray that this effort to stimulate discussion concerning this issue in the Catholic community bears much needed fruit. I will continue with this topic in subsequent editions of the newsletter.

(cf. *Bishops, Notre Dame and Other Universities encouraged by Shultz, Perry, and Nunn commit to revitalizing Catholic engagement on nuclear disarmament*, Paul Browne)



Notes

1 Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics* (New York: Times Books, 2012), p.6

2 Paul Stern et al, *Perspectives on Deterrence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.5-6

Deacon Bob Pallotti