

Nuclear weapons: surrender or defense?

Jane M. Orient, MD*



* Dr. Orient is President of the Tucson Chapter of AMWA.

Synopsis

Peace and survival are natural concerns of women and of physicians, who are now leading movements to save the world from the threat of nuclear weapons. After dire warnings of the consequences of such weapons, indignant and frightened citizens can be mobilized into prescribed courses of action. As women intuitively understand, both logic and action have an emotional wellspring. Helen Caldicott states hers: "I have grown up with the fear of imminent annihilation by nuclear holocaust."¹ This analysis explores the conclusions that might follow from a different foundation: "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" (*Psalms 27:3*).

Ground Zero Week: the source of the threat

Ground Zero: Your Town, USA. The scenario repeated across the nation in past weeks carries the message that nuclear war would mean the extinction of the species, or at least the end of civilization and the destruction of all that is worth fighting for.¹ The blitz of publicity, sponsored by a variety of organizations, including Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), uses visions of horror to overcome "psychic numbing," a mechanism of denial that prevents action. Only one type of action is demanded: support for the abolition of nuclear arms, beginning with a "bilateral freeze," is matched by vigorous opposition to civil defense or building defensive weapons.

In the flurry of lectures and

marches, a few pause to reflect that the missile bearing the warhead to Ground Zero will not be emblazoned with Stars and Stripes, but rather with a Red Star.

Of course, the proposed freeze is bilateral. However, our newspapers inform us of the number of citizens demonstrating in Washington, not the number parading in Moscow. At a meeting of the Tucson chapter of PSR, the number of signatures collected in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and State of Vermont was reported. Upon requesting news of progress on the international scene, I was reassured to learn that petitions are also circulating in Europe, Asia, and Australia. The Soviet Union has not been altogether overlooked. PSR wrote a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, who composed a nice response, thanking American scientists for assisting him in his quest for peace.² Only in an obscure corner of the *Wall Street Journal* does one read that members of the European peace movement unfurled a disarmament banner in Red Square, and were arrested within minutes, before they could distribute a single leaflet.³

The reason for the lack of emphasis on the Soviet Union is explained in lectures by PSR president Helen Caldicott and by other members: The Soviet arms build-up was simply a defensive reaction to the war-mongering of the US. We could trust them to abide by a *nuclear arms limitation treaty*, since they haven't (yet) been officially accused of violating such a treaty, notwithstanding their record on chemical and biological weapons, the Helsinki Accords, the United Nations charter (espe-

cially the section on self-determination), the Yalta agreement, and so on.

Despite recent events, and the testimony of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Vladimir Bukovsky, Victor Herman, and V.I. Lenin, many apparently believe that the objectives of the governments of the US and the USSR are indistinguishable. However, even if we accept the premise that the US is the primary danger to world peace, restraining its aggressive ambitions would not solve the problems referred to in separate compartments of PSR lectures: accidental war, nuclear proliferation, and the actions of madmen.

Is defense a delusion?

Peace activists proclaim that defense is worse than useless. It might actually make nuclear war more likely, by deceptively encouraging people to believe that such a war might be survivable.⁴ Prestigious medical groups, such as the American College of Physicians, endorse the assertion that there could be no "adequate medical response to nuclear war."⁵

Does the concept of adequate medical treatment for any kind of war make sense? The lifesaving response to an attack with a lance is to raise a shield. Against bombing runs, the appropriate defense is anti-aircraft artillery. The duty of the physician has always been simply to salvage whatever is possible after military defense has failed. The effectiveness of the operation is a relative matter. Clearly, preparation in ad-

vance permits a more successful intervention than complete lack of foresight. While predicting that epidemics would occur after an attack,⁶ PSR logic maintains that to stockpile vaccines, antibiotics, and water purification chemicals would be to become an accessory to the crime of war.

The Soviet Union evidently does not agree that civil defense is useless, and maintains an elaborate program, with compulsory training for all citizens. The Soviets claim that they could limit their casualties to no more than they suffered in World War II,⁷ and that they could rebuild their productive capacity within two to four years. Soviet techniques for protecting industry have been tested in the US by T.K. Jones, a mechanical engineer. Most of the equipment in a machine shop, insulated with aluminum chips, bales of hay, and sand, as described in a Soviet manual, still worked after being subjected to an explosion equivalent to 100 tons of TNT.* A shop protected American style (i.e., not at all) was completely blown away.⁸ While the Soviets may be overly optimistic about their ability to recover, their degree of confidence may be more pertinent than the accuracy of their estimates.

Other governments also provide for the common defense of their citizens. The most peaceful nation in the world, Switzerland, has an excellent shelter system, expected to be

* The distance of equal destruction varies as the cube root of released energy. Damage at 10 yards from 100 tons of TNT is equivalent to that sustained 100 yards away from a 1 megaton explosion.

able to protect the entire population by the year 2000. The industrious Chinese do not wring their hands and plead with their leaders to avoid provoking the American aggressor. All Chinese cities boast tunnels stocked with emergency supplies, accessible from all public buildings. Chou En-lai found the lack of elementary civil defense in America to be quite incredible.⁷

Besides burying our shield, the US has neglected to build defensive weapons, even though technological progress makes the outlook for effective defense, even missile-killers, increasingly hopeful.⁹ Unfortunately, the US negotiated away our advantage in antiballistic missiles in the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks.¹⁰ Our defense depends totally on the threat of massive retaliation, M(utual) A(ssured) D(estruction). Paradoxically, PSR advocates this doctrine, at least by implication, as it points out how any arm of our defense could inflict "unacceptable" damage on the Soviets, so that new arms development is wasteful. "Overkill" is evil, but because of it we can safely pour dollars for defense into social programs,¹¹ and evade all discussion about what would constitute an effective strategy for survival as a free people. Nobody remembers that the French had enough ammunition in the Maginot Line to kill every German many times.

The answer given by the peace movement to the problem of nuclear weapons is to change human nature. The US must lead the way in displaying the jugular to the enemy. As Helen Caldicott has said, the use of

any weapons in a nuclear world is likely to trigger a holocaust. Therefore, we must depend solely on the use of democracy and the larynx. Perhaps we should rely on European peace marchers to turn back 20,000 Soviet tanks at the West German frontier with the moral Force.

Can attempts at prevention actually cause the disease?

Counting signatures on petitions is a superfluous exercise. Everybody is in favor of averting the catastrophe of nuclear war. The question is, how shall it be done? History shows that warfare has never been prevented by military weakness or cowardice. Negotiations with armed thugs have been consistently unrewarding. Until we develop a satellite with x-ray vision that can penetrate to tunnels in the Urals, bilateral, verifiable disarmament requires that the Soviet Union cease being a totalitarian society. Therefore, the program proposed by PSR is a delusion. The hidden agenda is unilateral disarmament. In an early experiment with this tactic, the sons of Jacob persuaded the Shechemites to be circumcised, all on the same day, then slew every one in retribution for the rape of Dinah (*Genesis* 34).

Ultimately, the outcome of the enactment of proposals of sincere but naive peacemakers is to confront our people with a choice: surrender, or be bombed back into the Stone Age. The alternative for those who treasure both their liberty and their lives is to work for as effective a defense as possible. If the price is too high,

then let us teach our children to accept slavery in the Gulag.

Shall American women physicians speak for the emasculation of our society? The words of the freeze proponents are but an echo of an ancient prelude to disaster: "These men are peaceable with us. . . only let us consent unto them" (*Genesis* 34:21, 23).

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