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Nuclear Weapons Ban? What Needs to be Banned Is U.S. Arrogance

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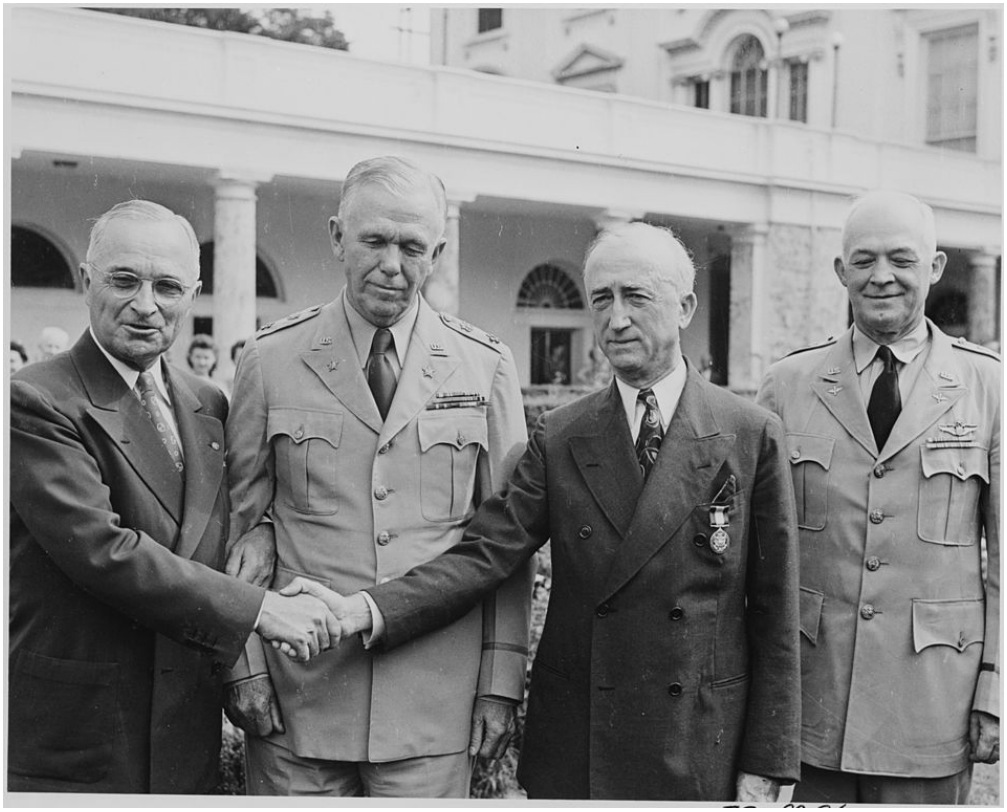
In a context of almost total indifference, marked by outright hostility, representatives of over a hundred of the world's least powerful countries are currently opening another three-week session of United Nations talks aimed at achieving a legally binding ban on nuclear weapons. Very few people even know this is happening.

Ban nuclear weapons? Ho hum… Let's change the subject.

Let's talk about Russian hacking instead, or the rights of trans-sexuals to use the toilet of their choice, or even about something really important: climate change.

But wait a minute. The damage to human society, and to "the planet", from the projected rise of a few degrees of global temperature, while commonly described as apocalyptic, would be minor compared to the results of all-out nuclear war. More to the point, the degree of human responsibility in climate change is more disputed among serious scientists than the public is aware, due to the role of such contributing factors as solar variations. But the degree of human responsibility for nuclear weapons is unquestionably total. The nuclear war peril is man-made, and some of the men who made it can even be named, such as James Byrnes, Harry Truman and General Lester Groves. The United States government consciously and deliberately created this danger to human life on earth. Faced with the United States' demonstrated capacity and moral readiness to wipe out whole cities with their devices, other countries built their own deadly devices as deterrents. Those deterrents have never been used, which lulls the public into believing the danger is past.



Photograph of President Truman shaking hands with Secretary of State James F. Byrnes after awarding him the Distinguished Service Medal, as General George C. Marshall and General Henry “Hap” Arnold look on. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

But the United States, the only power already guilty of nuclear manslaughter, continues to perfect its nuclear arsenal and to proclaim its “right” to launch a “first strike” whenever it chooses.

The United States naturally calls for boycotting the nuclear arms ban conference.

On the occasion of an earlier such conference last March, President Trump’s gormless U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, wrapped her lame excuse in womanliness:

> “As a mom and a daughter there is nothing I want more for my family than a world with no nuclear weapons,” she shamelessly uttered. “But we have to be realistic. Is there anyone that believes that North Korea would agree to a ban on nuclear weapons?”

Well, yes. There are many people who have obviously thought more about this than Nikki Haley and who are well aware that North Korea, surrounded by aggressive U.S. forces for seven decades, considers its little nuclear arsenal to be a deterrent, and would certainly give it up in exchange for a convincing end to the U.S. threat.

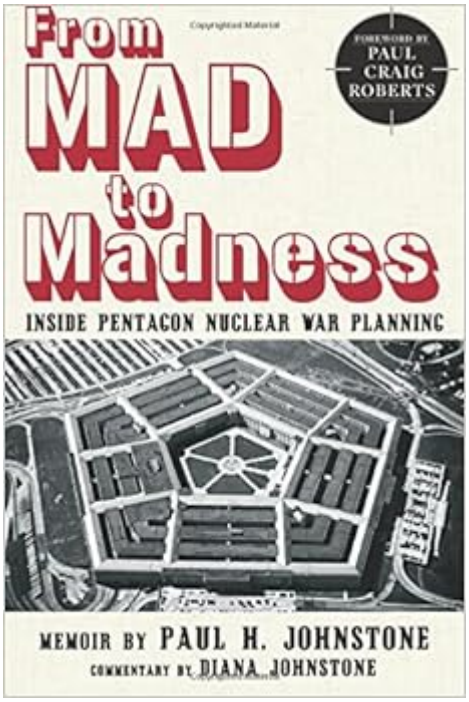
North Korea is a very odd country, an heir to the medieval “Hermit Kingdom” with an ideology forged in communist resistance to Japanese imperialism of the previous century. Its highly eccentric leadership is using advanced technology as an imitation Great Wall. An all-Korean peace settlement would solve the issue.

It is absurd to claim that the threat of nuclear war comes from Pyongyang rather than from

the Pentagon. Hyping up Pyongyang's "threat" is a way to pretend that the U.S. nuclear arsenal is "defensive", when the reality is the other way around.

A legally binding ban on nuclear weapons is an excellent idea, approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and it would be fine for experts to work out all the technical and legal details, just in case –in case there is a huge change in the mental outlook that reigns in and around the District of Columbia.

NRA advocates like to defend their cause by proclaiming that "guns don't kill people, people kill people". It is more precise to say that people with guns kill people. Nuclear weapons don't destroy the world. But people with nuclear weapons could destroy the world. What matters is what is in people's heads.



Source: Amazon

During the height of the Cold War, my father, Dr. Paul H. Johnstone, worked for twenty years as senior analyst in the Pentagon's Weapons Systems Evaluation Group (WSEG), where teams of experts tried to figure out what would happen in a nuclear war between the United States and Russia (the Soviet Union at that time, although they commonly referred to it as "Russia"). In his retirement he wrote a book recounting what he had learned from that experience, which has now been published by Clarity Press with the title *From MAD to Madness*. He found that apparently normal, even kind and considerate men were able to contemplate initiating general nuclear war and killing millions of fellow humans as a reasonable possibility. Even if some of those millions were fellow Americans.

The result of one high-level study went like this:

> "the general consensus has been that while a nuclear exchange would leave the U.S. in a seriously damaged condition, with many millions of casualties and little immediate war supporting capability, the U.S. would continue to exist as an organized and viable nation, and ultimately would prevail, whereas the USSR would not."

Twenty year later, my father commented:

> "This basic situation has not changed. Nuclear weapons are still there and analysts are still analyzing how to use them."

And still forty years after that, the basic situation has not changed, except possibly for the worse. What is worse is not only the arsenal, which now aims at achieving such accuracy and underground penetration that it could wipe out an adversary's command structure before it realizes what has happened. What is really much worse is the mentality that goes with those pretensions, notably the rise of a power-hungry clique called the "neoconservatives" that has in the past thirty years won official Washington over to its ambitions of US global supremacy. There is no longer an ideological enemy. There is just somebody else there who feels equally at home on this planet.

The current anti-Russia hysteria is nothing but a symptom of that mentality, which finds any challenge to US world domination to be intolerable.

Plans are surely being made to remove such intolerable challenges. This is not done in open congressional hearings with cameras. It is done in the military planning division of the Pentagon, preparing for any possible contingency. Plans are surely being made right now to wage nuclear war against Russia and China, not to mention Iran. The executive summary for busy political leaders is apt to conclude optimistically that despite problems, the United States "will prevail".

The United States with its nuclear arsenal is like a demented maniac with delusions of grandeur. The delusions are institutional rather than individual. Psychologists may be brought to the scene to try to cajole an individual maniac who has taken a schoolroom of children as hostages, but there is no known psychological treatment for such a mass delusion. Ostensibly normal Americans truly believe that their nation is "exceptional". Their military doctrine does not talk about "defeating" but "destroying". You may "defeat" an enemy in a war over some issue, but for the Pentagon, the enemy must be destroyed. To eventually serve this death machine, young Americans are being trained by movies and video games to view enemies as extraterrestrials, intruders in our world who can be wiped out, not real humans the way Americans are.

The fundamental reason that United States leaders feel obliged to maintain nuclear supremacy is their belief that "exceptional" America has a right and duty to possess an absolute power of destruction. So long as that mentality rules in Washington, there is no possibility of nuclear disarmament, and every possibility of nuclear war sooner or later. Nuclear disarmament – a totally necessary safety precaution for humanity – will be possible only when leaders in Washington recognize that other peoples also have a right and a will to live.

The real question is how to achieve this psychological transformation.

Ever since August 1945, we have heard it said that "Hiroshima must be a moral awakening", bringing people together in common concern for humanity. That has not happened. Indeed, today, the moral slumber is deeper than ever.

Diana Johnstone is author of the introduction to her father's book, From MAD to Madness, by

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