

Halting Drift Towards Annihilation

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In the third century BC, Asoka, one of the greatest of our kinds, won a glorious but bloody victory. Horrified at the death and destruction, he renounced war as an instrument of state policy and began to propagate non-violence and peace. His example was memorable, but also not infectious. Down the centuries, in my own country and others, war, vandalism and violence have continued, maiming and killing millions, and wiping out entire cultures. In less sophisticated terms, separate survival was possible. In the midst of desolation, there was some hope of renewal.

This slender chance of survival in war is now threatened by the growing barbarity and efficiency of human creations. We are confronted with the possibility and probability of the total extinction of the human race, its memories, its achievements and its prospects. The great powers have acquired capacity to destroy the common heritage of humankind many times over and in a manner which would make the environment itself too noxious even for those few scattered groups which might escape the initial death wave. We are told that it would take several millennia for organic life to begin all over again.

The international community's attempts to limit the manufacture and use of armaments have been in vain. The partial Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty have not lessened the destructive capacity of the

Great powers. Nor have nuclear weapon States practised the self-restraint which they wish to impose on others, particularly those who have no intention of entering the nuclear arms race. This problem must be dealt with at the point where it is most serious, that is, the relations between the Great Powers and their mutual discussion on arms control. It is unrealistic to expect continued protection from the so-called balance of terror. In the escalating of stockpiles, how can any one possessor of the nuclear weapons claim moral superiority?

Merely because nuclear weapons have not been deployed after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we cannot ignore the thousands of nuclear warheads cruising the oceans. An inadvertent act could well spark off a war.

I am alarmed at the wholly untenable theory of the limited use of nuclear weapons and how insidiously minds are being conditioned to the idea of nuclear wars being winnable and that human civilization can survive such a war without much damage, perhaps a little better for being cleansed of ideological adversaries. Could there be greater self-deception? No serious analyst believes that nuclear wars can be limited. Any such conflict, begun in the most nicely calculated manner in quantity and quality, would inevitably escalate into a global holocaust.

This realization is causing concerned women and men to voice their anguish. Life, culture and civilization cannot be renewed through mutual destruction. The populations of the great powers and millions of people in the developing world have had no say in decisions which determine their fates and that of future generations. I believe the time has come when the world's meek and disinherited are no less concerned and must be heard.

In a message to the recent UN Conference on Disarmament, I suggested the following concrete programme of action to bring about total disarmament:

1. Negotiation of a binding nature on the non-use of nuclear weapons.
2. As a first step towards the eventual reduction of existing stockpiles, a freeze on nuclear weapons, providing for the total stoppage of any further production of nuclear weapons, combined with a cut-off in the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes.
3. Immediate suspension of all nuclear weapons tests.
4. Towards this objective, negotiations towards a treaty on general complete disarmament, within an agreed time-frame as discussed between the USA and USSR in the agreed principles and draft treaties of the early 1960s.
5. Initiative by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in educating the public on the dangers of nuclear war, on the deadly effects of the arms race on the world economy, as well as the positive aspects of disarmament and its link with development.

A few countries have since declared that they would not be the first to use nuclear weapons. It would be a welcome beginning to a new programme of disarmament if all other nuclear weapons States made similar announcements.

To the people of the poorer countries, the danger of nuclear war may seem remote and unreal as compared to the

immediate pressure of want and exploitation. The problem of arms-control must be dealt with by simultaneous efforts to reduce the economic and social disparities which feed international conflicts. We in the nonaligned group see an organic link between armament expenditure and economic reconstruction. A token reduction in armament expenditure and its diversion to economic assistance to developing countries would produce dramatic results. On a more universal level, diverting the use of our scarce mineral resources from non-productive purposes, would greatly help the conservation of our planet's finite resources.

At our stage of human achievement and consciousness, some of the older Commitments which were moral, constructive and creative are becoming increasingly restrictive. Narrow patriotism, regional pride and sectarian prejudice do not help struggle for survival as a single race. In the next century we could well think of planetary patriotism over preoccupation with dead or dying loyalties. Growing scientific and technological ability can ensure a minimum quality of life to all peoples everywhere on earth within a generation or two. It is never too late to step back from the brink. To avoid the drift towards annihilation and race suicide with courage and determination would be the most wonderful and laudable achievement.

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