

Nuclear Disarmament Days
March 11-12, 2006, Paris
John Burroughs and Jacqueline Cabasso
Plenary Remarks, March 11
U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy and the New U.S. Peace Movement

John Burroughs

Bonjour. Je suis très content d'être avec vous aujourd'hui. Je suis désolé, mais il faut que je parle en anglais.

Greetings from New York, where my organization, the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, is based. It is affiliated with the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA). I want to tell you a little about the regressive U.S. policy on nuclear weapons. Then Jackie Cabasso, executive director of the Western States Legal Foundation, based in Oakland, California, also affiliated with IALANA, will talk about the new U.S. peace movement.

In the Bush administration years, the single most important backward step in the nuclear sphere has been the 2002 Moscow Treaty. With Russian acquiescence, the United States has abandoned application of the principles of verification, transparency, and irreversibility in bilateral reductions. The abandoned principles were endorsed in the 2000 NPT Practical Steps for Disarmament. They were also inherent in the decades-old history of arms control between the two countries.

The two-page long Moscow Treaty requires only that at a single point in time, December 31, 2012, deployed strategic warheads not exceed a certain number on each side, 2200. "Deployed" means loaded on delivery systems, ready for use. "Strategic" means long-range. Unlike previous actual or proposed U.S.-Russian agreements, the treaty does not require destruction of delivery systems or dismantlement of warheads. It also does not provide for verification of reductions.

Beyond the deployed strategic forces, the United States plans to retain large numbers of warheads in a "responsive force" capable of redeployment within weeks or months. It is estimated the U.S. will have 6000 warheads altogether in 2012. No further U.S.-Russian negotiations on reductions are planned.

Also a backward step, of course, was the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002. Now the United States is spending in excess of \$10 billion a year on development of anti-missile systems. But workable systems have yet to be created.

Often forgotten is that the United States and Russia still have large nuclear forces poised to destroy the other side. Together the two countries have about 3,000 warheads on high alert, ready for launch within minutes of an order to do so. This is contrary to the 2000 NPT commitment to reduced operational status of nuclear forces.

The United States is modernizing land and submarine-based missiles; researching new delivery systems like an improved cruise missile; and upgrading its command and control systems. The United States is also refurbishing every warhead type in its still vast nuclear arsenal, in some cases giving them new or enhanced military capabilities.

Due to Congressional opposition, the “advanced concepts” program has been dropped, including research on “mini-nukes.” However, the United States, like Russia, has had low-yield weapons in its arsenal for decades. Also dropped was the research on earth-penetrators involving modification of existing high-yield weapons. Instead there is now the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program, which is explicitly intended to redesign and replace the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal. Under this program, virtually every warhead component will be redesigned, most likely including the physics packages – the spherical plutonium cores, commonly referred to as “pits.” In a recent speech, Linton Brooks, the head of the U.S. weapons complex, said that in 25 years the arsenal would largely consist of these replacement warheads. In addition, he said that “the weapons design community that was revitalized by the RRW program can ... design, develop and begin production of [a] new design within 3-4 years of a decision to do so.”

This year the U.S. will spend nearly \$7 billion to maintain and modernize its nuclear warheads. Accounting for inflation, this is 1-1/2 times the average annual spending during the Cold War years. If you add the money going to maintain and modernize the warheads’ means of delivery, the United States is spending \$25-30 billion or more on its nuclear forces.

It has been widely publicized that the United States has enlarged the range of circumstances in which nuclear weapons might be used. The 2002 National Security Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction Strategy, carrying the imprimatur of President Bush, removed ambiguity from previous U.S. policy. It states that “overwhelming force” - a reference to the nuclear option - would be used against chemical and biological attacks. The Defense Department’s 2001 Nuclear Posture Review states that nuclear weapons “could be employed against targets able to withstand nonnuclear attack, (for example, deep underground bunkers or bio-weapon facilities),” and refers to use of nuclear weapons in response to “surprising military developments.”

During the Clinton administration, references to options for use of nuclear weapons in response to biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons use and capabilities surfaced in a variety of governmental settings. Policy pronouncements during the Bush administration thus do not represent an entirely new phenomenon. However, they are different in four important respects. First, the authoritativeness is heightened, by a presidential signature on a public document in the case of the National Security Strategy. Second, ambiguity has been effectively removed about whether the United States maintains the option of a nuclear response to use of chemical and biological weapons. Third, the possibility of nuclear preemptive use has been given a higher profile. Fourth, the Nuclear Posture Review’s reference to “surprising military developments” theoretically greatly widened the circumstances for U.S. nuclear use.

So does all this mean that the United States is more likely to use nuclear weapons? After 60 years of non-use, it is uncertain whether these developments should be interpreted as dramatically lowering the political threshold for U.S. nuclear weapons use. What is unquestionably different now is that the U.S. is prepared to initiate aggressive wars with elevated risks of unintended consequences, including the creation of dire situations in which nuclear weapons might be used. Consider this too: who would have believed 10 years ago that torture would be official U.S. policy and hundreds of people would be detained indefinitely, without trials, at Guantanamo?

Jacqueline Cabasso

After hearing this litany of excess and evil, you may be asking, where is the U.S. peace movement? When the Cold War abruptly ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, activists and ordinary Americans breathed a huge collective sigh of relief, hoping and believing that they had walked away from a nuclear holocaust, and putting nuclear weapons out of their minds. Many activists went on to other issues – U.S. military interventions in Central America, apartheid in South Africa, saving ancient forests, etc. Others went back to their day-to-day lives, raising families and working to making ends meet. Questions of nuclear arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament became increasingly relegated to elite policy circles inside the Washington DC beltway. Credentialed “experts” redefined post-Cold War nuclear priorities almost solely in terms of securing Russian “loose nukes” and keeping them out of the hands of “rogue” states and terrorists. Unchallenged by the arms control community, and oblivious to calls for disarmament, the Clinton Administration squandered the historically unprecedented period of opportunity that appeared with the end of the Cold War.

All of this began to change in the run up to the U.S. attack on Iraq. A new anti-war movement began to coalesce. There was a heightened sensitivity to the domestic impacts of the “war on terror,” including restrictions on civil liberties of immigrants and others, and the lack of social services for the poorest members of our population. The first National Assembly of United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), held in Chicago in June 2003, seemed like a good opportunity to reclaim nuclear disarmament as a peace and justice issue, and to reintegrate it into the broader anti-war movement. A proposal from U.S. Abolition 2000 groups to make nuclear disarmament a UFPJ priority was adopted, with little discussion or controversy.

It was striking, however, that several delegates voiced objections to the effect that “nuclear disarmament is the *Bush* agenda!” In other words, the Bush administration wants to disarm *other* countries. This turned out to be the tip of an iceberg, exposing a vast lack of awareness in the new anti-war movement – reflecting the general lack of public awareness – about the post-Cold War realities of U.S. nuclear weapons. And it marked the beginning of a continuing internal education process in UFPJ, the largest anti-war coalition in the country, with over 1,300 member groups.

In August 2004, on the 59th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombings, the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, urged on by the aging “Hibakusha” – survivors – in their cities,

launched the Mayors for Peace Emergency Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons. Revisiting the Abolition 2000 agenda, they presented their “2020 Vision,” a timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons by 2020, which they would bring as a demand to the NPT 5-year Review Conference in May 2005. By the time they got to New York, well over 500 Mayors from 32 countries – 65 of them from the U.S. – had signed onto the Mayors’ campaign statement.

On May 1, the day before the 2005 NPT Review Conference began, Abolition 2000 and United for Peace and Justice joined forces to demand: “*End the War in Iraq. Abolish All Nuclear Weapons. NO NUKES! NO WARS!*” 40,000 people marched past United Nations headquarters in New York City and many thousands rallied in Central Park. The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and dozens of Hibakusha carried the lead banner, flanked by city officials and NGO leaders from around the world. Behind them, spirited anti-nuclear and anti-war activists filled more than 13 city blocks.

So May 1 was a highly successful event. But it is a difficult challenge to integrate nuclear disarmament into the peace movement on an ongoing basis. There is a lack of infrastructure and resources in the USA, and still much ignorance about the basic facts regarding U.S. policy John reviewed for you.

Our next opportunity is in the week beginning March 15, when groups in the US and worldwide will demonstrate against the Iraq war on its third anniversary.. In the United States, a special focus will be a demand for the media to tell the truth about the war. Then on April 29, there will be a massive March for Peace, Democracy and Justice in New York City. This is sponsored by United for Peace and Justice and other major national organizations like the National Organization for Women and Friends of the Earth – groups working to defend the rights of women and labor, to protect the environment and prevent climate change. You can see there is an effort to integrate issues, and supporters of nuclear abolition will be there!

The short version of everything John and I have said is this: The nuclear weapons enterprise is still thriving, but the peace movement is also coming alive – it is, after all, on the side of life!