

Nuclear Weapons Paradox: A call for a Safer and Harmonious World

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Can nuclear weapons save our planet?

In September 1983, during the height of the Cold War, the world faced an alarming threat of full-blown nuclear war. The Soviet Nuclear Early Warning System detected a series of five Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles apparently launched from the United States. At the helm of this critical situation was a young engineer named Stanislav Petrov and his team, stationed in the command center. Petrov's responsibility was to promptly report such incidents up the chain of command for an appropriate response. However, he acted differently, relying on his instincts to discern that it might be a false alarm. Courageously taking a stand, he chose to wait for further evidence, fully aware of the grave consequences if he was wrong. As time passed, Petrov's gut feeling proved accurate, and it was indeed a false alarm. His singular act of caution prevented a potentially catastrophic retaliatory strike from the United States, sparing the world from a devastating nuclear conflict. This incident is one of many "nuclear close calls" that have occurred over the last seven decades since the first and last use of nuclear weapons during World War II. The dangerous dance between nuclear power states has placed the entire planet and all of humanity at risk of extinction.

For how long are we going to continue living in constant fear of being totally annihilated?

My own awareness of nuclear weapons began when I was 12 years old. I stumbled upon information about Hiroshima and Nagasaki while surfing through the Encarta digital encyclopedia. Learning about the immense destructive power of these weapons and their devastating impact on those cities left a profound mark on me. Little did I know that 16 years later, I would be living just meters away from the site where the bomb was detonated in Nagasaki.

Despite residing in Nagasaki for several months, it was not until early this year that I truly grasped the horrors of that fateful event. The turning point came through my participation in an eye-opening program called The Global Praxis in Nagasaki, organized by the University of Tokyo with support from Nagasaki University. The program explored the historical connection between Nagasaki and Global Health, with a particular focus on the atomic bomb incident. As we visited various sites, such as the atomic bomb museum, Takashi Nagai Museum, Urakami Cathedral, and the Atomic Bomb Disease Institute, the event became more vivid and real. Fragments of buildings recovered from the debris, melted glass and bottles, and the blood-stained lab coat of Dr. Issei Nishimori brought an event that once seemed distant in time and space back into sharp consciousness. We met and interacted with one of the few remaining survivors, it was a deeply emotional experience. However, the most significant impact on my perspective came from reading "The Bells of Nagasaki" by Dr. Nagai Takashi, a haunting firsthand account of the atomic bomb incident. For days, his recollections of the moments leading up to the bomb's dropping and its aftermath weighed heavily on my mind. I visited the hypocentre park often to just sit and reflect. During one of these contemplative moments, a profound question surfaced in my mind:

Are nuclear weapons truly the root problem, or are they merely instruments wielded by humanity to mask a deeper issue—our collective intolerance and failure to recognize the inherent equality of all human beings?

Our world today, is faced with escalating geopolitical tensions and existential threats, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine bringing us just 90 seconds to midnight on the Doomsday Clock, the closest we have ever been. The need for a nuclear weapons-free future becomes ever more paramount. While the elimination of nuclear weapons is undoubtedly crucial, we must also confront the root cause of our struggles: our flawed ability to co-exist harmoniously as humans, as equals.

Nuclear weapons epitomize humanity's capacity for destruction, possessing the ability to inflict unparalleled devastation. The mere existence of these weapons perpetuates a dangerous and costly arms

race, sowing seeds of mistrust and hostility among nations. History bears witness to the dreadful consequences of nuclear warfare.

The prevailing assumption that the presence of nuclear weapons somehow guarantees relative peace under the doctrine of mutually assured destruction falls short of justifying their existence. Nuclear weapons are unique creations, built with the hope of never having to use them, yet nations continue to develop them, each iteration more deadly than the last. At present, there are over 12,000 nuclear warheads scattered across the world, presenting a risk too immense to overlook.

The path to a safer future lies not in the continued possession of these weapons but in concerted efforts towards complete disarmament. The potential for accidental launch, technological malfunction, or the emergence of aggressive leaders makes the risk unacceptable. True peace will only be attained by prioritizing diplomacy, cooperation, and the shared vision of a peaceful and nuclear weapons-free world. We need an alternative to ensuring peace that does not involve us killing off one another, and achieving this, will indeed be our greatest evolutionary success. We must unite in our determination to secure a future where the specter of nuclear annihilation no longer looms, and the survival and prosperity of all nations and peoples are safeguarded.