

Up from the Concrete: Making Connections and Building Coalitions for a U.S.  
Movement to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

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## Introduction

The October 1999 U.S. Senate vote against ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban (CTBT) was viewed by many as a watershed moment. Within circles whose main work is devoted to arms control and nuclear weapons abolition, the vote has been viewed both as a disaster and an opportunity, threatening future progress on international arms agreements but focusing more attention in the United States on nuclear weapons issues than at any time in recent years. This has led to a flurry of proposals from various quarters for nuclear weapons reduction or abolition strategies, most concerned primarily either with reviving the CTBT or with attempting to sustain the current wave of attention by linking it to the 2000 national elections.

Both the CTBT vote, however, and the predominant responses to it reveal not how much has changed, but how little. The administration continues to represent the Comprehensive Test Ban mainly as a means to retain a decisive U.S. technological advantage in weapons of mass destruction, rather than as a step on the path to the abolition of nuclear weapons, and it insists on linking arms control measures politically to an intense, broad ranging program of high technology weapons development, from continued improvements in nuclear weapons systems to anti-ballistic missile systems and technologies for other space-based weapons. Much of the arms control community still appears ready to accept this linkage without public criticism, with the exception of activities which would directly violate the ABM treaty. And across most of the peace movement landscape, the assumption still seems prevalent that nuclear weapons abolition can be approached as a conventional, single-issue campaign, a matter of mobilizing already committed constituencies to bring pressure to bear on elected officials.

These approaches, unfortunately, have a proven record of failure. Despite the apparent opportunity presented by the end of the Cold War, arms controllers and the peace movement in the United States have been unable to prevent a determined move back towards militarism. The U.S. military budget is on the rise, unilateral military action without regard for international law now is so commonplace that U.S. air strikes on a foreign country often fail to rate a headline, and even the basic treaty infrastructure taken as given at the height of arms competition is eroding in the pell-mell pursuit of more high tech weaponry. Arms reduction negotiations are stalled, and a dangerous new nuclear arms race is emerging in South Asia. The future of the entire NPT regime is in question, due in large part to the failure of the U.S. and other nuclear weapons states to make any real progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons, retaining arsenals capable of destroying all human civilization many times over. In the U.S., nuclear arms reduction mainly has paled away politically-driven Cold War excess, leaving a modernized, cheaper, and still hugely destructive arsenal. And yet, peace and arms control groups seem to have a difficult time convincing people that their issue still exists, much less that it is compelling.

Our problem is not that our issue is too complex, or that people are so de-politicized that organizing is impossible. The recent mobilization against the World Trade Organization (WTO) demonstrated that innovative new alliances can be built, even around matters which at first appear

to fall within obscure realms of debate dominated by mainstream experts. The WTO successes also suggest, however, that we must be willing to talk about what most people already intuitively understand: that the many manifestations of the crisis we are in— falling standards of living for billions of human beings, the collapse of states and social organization over broad regions, continuing ecological degradation, a resurgence of international tensions and militarism— all are caused in large part by a tremendously unjust distribution of wealth and power. People came to Seattle because they grasped the connections between a previously obscure trade agency and the job they feared losing, or the beloved piece of the natural world they had seen despoiled. More important, they understood that the problem was not just a bad result, something they could ask their governments to re-craft or recalculate, but the entire structure: one in which decisions are made in secret by unaccountable elites, for the profit of a few, veiled by the arcana of economic and diplomatic “expertise,” far from the places the social and ecological effects are felt.

As I have argued in greater detail elsewhere, abolition of nuclear weapons most likely will not be possible unless accompanied by major changes in the way that the United States government uses military force, and in its relationship with the large, concentrated economic entities whose interests are served by U.S. foreign and military policy.<sup>1</sup> Changes of this magnitude will require a social movement sustained over a long period of time, which challenges not only U.S. nuclear weapons policy but the interests which benefit from nuclear weapons production and from the foreign policy enforced by the world’s most powerful military, which still brandishes nuclear weapons as its ultimate threat. The WTO campaign is a manifestation of widespread discontent with an international order enforced in no small part by U.S. arms, suggesting that the time is right to begin making these connections.

### **Nuclear Weapons Abolition as Part of a Broader Social Movement for Peace, Global Equity, and Ecological Balance: Some Criteria for Choosing Actions**

If we acknowledge that the abolition of nuclear weapons will require a long-term effort undertaken together with broader efforts for fundamental social change, we then should evaluate our strategies and tactics according to how well they serve the goal of building the requisite movements and organizations. The remainder of this working paper is one attempt to begin this inquiry. Some questions we might ask ourselves in choosing our actions to build a movement for abolition of nuclear weapons which is sustainable for the long term are:

- Does the action increase our understanding of the issue in a way which also will be understandable to others? Does the action help us to understand and explain the connections between the need to abolish nuclear weapons and other issues which people care deeply about and which affect their everyday lives?

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<sup>1</sup> See “Some Thoughts about the Path to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons and Strategies for Organizing in the United States,” Western States Legal Foundation Working Paper No.1, April 1999.

- Does the action build skills in activists, and provide activists with a way they can become and remain engaged with the issue?
- Does the action build organizational structures which can be sustained? In particular, does it create or help to sustain new organizing “nodes” around which further activity can coalesce, particularly in geographic regions or sectors of society where there currently is little activism on this issue?
- Does the action build coalitions which will last?
- And finally, because no one really knows the answer to these difficult questions, do our campaigns and organizational structures foster and sustain a variety of approaches, and are they designed to help us learn from our experiences and from each other about what works and what doesn't?

The coalitions which must be formed to begin this long-term effort cannot be fully envisioned beforehand. This paper suggests that we begin the process of discovering who our natural allies are, and of exploring the nature of our common interests, our best means of working together, and strategies which might be promising, by focusing on the concrete manifestations of continuing nuclear weapons research, development, testing, production, and use— for threat of apocalyptic violence surely is a nuclear weapons use— in our localities and in our everyday lives.

I will discuss the opportunities this approach holds for long-term movement building, for developing skills among activists, and for fostering a broader discussion about how decisions are made in this society about fundamental social, economic, and technological choices which affect all of us.

### **Increasing our understanding of the obstacles and opportunities for nuclear weapons abolition through the building of new coalitions**

A central focus of a sustained, long-term campaign to abolish nuclear weapons must be the impacts of continuing nuclear arms research, testing, and production on our communities and on the structure of our society. We must be able to understand and to explain to others the ways in which our society's continuing commitment to nuclear weapons shapes our technology choices, our economy, and our politics on the local as well as the national level. We must also be able to identify and explain the effects on our ecosystems and our health not only of activities immediately involved in the design, testing and production of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems, but of the centralized, capital and energy intensive forms of industrial activity which the nuclear weapons industry has subsidized, developed technology for, and helped protect through a foreign policy which assures the extraction of resources world wide on inequitable terms— in many instances virtually at gunpoint (or perhaps, more accurately today, at missile point).

We do not, however, have to do be able to do this before our organizing efforts begin. The reverse is true: we do not need, or want, to sequester ourselves debating some perfect analysis of nuclear weapons and their place in the order of things. Rather, we should take as a starting point the visible manifestations of the nuclear weapons industry, from the effects on watersheds, workers lungs, and fragmented indigenous communities of uranium mining, on through warhead manufacturing and the myriad nuclear test technologies to missile and aircraft manufacture, to the structural effects on the economy of hundreds of billions of dollars of public money spent on everything from high energy physics, nuclear power, high performance computing, to exotic alloys for high speed missiles and aircraft, and on to launch tests, drop tests, and the profound ecological impacts of maintaining and exercising an immense arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, from sensitive estuaries dredged for submarines and deep draft nuclear aircraft carriers to the risks of accident as weapons are loaded, transported, and deployed on alert, and finally to the corrosive effect of decades of secrecy and lies both on our scientific and political institutions. And this is just a random sample, conjured up at a moment's thought.

The process of exploring these pervasive effects of a half century-long nuclear arms race, of discovering and talking together about the connections to other issues that we and our neighbors find important, helps us to build the movement we need. It deepens our comprehension of our current circumstances--for understanding the structural relationships between the nuclear weapons industry, the interests its serves, and other powerful institutions and actors helps us to recognize both the obstacles and the opportunities on the path to abolition. And as we discover the connections, as we seek out the people who know about them, or reach out to people affected by social choices so large they have become the invisible conditions of our existence, or by environmental and social decline which is all too visible but whose causes have been obscure, we can identify allies and build new coalitions.

The movement-building potential of concrete local and regional manifestations of the nuclear weapons complex and its history means that we should use our inquiry into them as our starting point. We should not try to produce a comprehensive "expert" analysis which will be the document which both mobilizes new constituencies and lays out a strategy for action from beginning to end. None of this means that we can avoid our obligation to do in-depth, quality research and analysis. But we must be realistic about the limits imposed on our understanding by the narrow constraints of conventional professional and academic approaches, and recognize the extent to which their abstract categories exclude both the detail and the interconnectedness of living social and ecological systems. Restoring the role of local knowledges embedded in particular communities and first-hand, long-term experience of particular ecosystems does more than democratize inquiry in a formal way; it can over time enrich and transform the nature of knowing itself.

Organizing to investigate, discuss, and oppose particular projects and programs in the communities and regions where their social and ecological impacts are felt (and may have been felt for decades) makes for a continuing process in which we constantly can discover new

connections, new shared understanding, and hence a broader and deeper common basis for action. It helps us to rediscover our connection to and responsibility for our small piece of the planet, and the way destructive technologies and economic structures have eroded our communities, our connections to each other. Over time, more fundamental characteristics of the politics we share with our growing set of allies will emerge, beginning with our common commitments to give voice to the communities affected by decisions made in boardrooms and legislative chambers thousands of miles away, and to democratize the way scientific agendas are set and technology choices are made.

In addition, our focus on concrete manifestations of the nuclear establishment provides opportunities for many different types of action, and hence for a range of skills, tactics, and political styles to be learned and used. At a recent meeting of abolition activists in Michigan, a brief brainstorm on mixed oxide (MOX) fuel shipments slated to go through the region produced a rich variety of starting points for local discussion and action on nuclear weapons, nuclear power, the nuclear fuel cycle, and its social, economic, and environmental effects: Uranium for nuclear warheads had been mined on tribal lands in Northern Michigan and across the lakes in Canada. Members of the First Nations of the region, having lost much of their land base to mining and other extractive activities, worked in the mines, and then were left with neither land nor jobs when many of the mines closed. The region was left with a legacy of long-lasting health and environmental consequences from uranium mining. The uranium was shipped to nuclear materials processing plants around the U.S. and incorporated into nuclear weapons, leaving many workers and broad portions of ecosystems poisoned at many sites. Now the laboratories which designed these weapons of mass destruction are engineering a dangerous, but profitable (given massive taxpayer subsidies) new fuel cycle which will help sustain the nuclear industry for decades to come. Plutonium will be combined into mixed oxide fuels at the Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico, where the first nuclear bombs – and many more– were designed and built. This fuel will be burned in nuclear reactors, after a fabrication process which will create yet more radioactive waste. This MOX fuel will be shipped for its initial test burns back through the region where some of the uranium used in bombs first was mined, completing a half-century long nuclear cycle about which few of those around the many places affected had any meaningful say.

Action on one or more aspects of any complex piece of the nuclear cycle can encompass a broad range of people, organizations, tactics, and skills. In our example, it might go like this: The original inhabitants of the region can educate those who came later about what was and what we have done to it, about our collective responsibility-- and about the capacity to resist over generations, to sustain the communities and the commitments needed. Researchers could further investigate the past and present of the nuclear cycle in this region and their effects. People with technical skills can provide information about MOX fuel fabrication, the waste it produces, and the environmental risks and economic effects of nuclear power. Economists, historians, ecologists, and social theorists can help investigate the way these and other related industrial activities have shaped the affected regions, providing a perspective on how things could have been (and still could be) different. Groups focusing on disarmament policy can provide the broader

context of the arms race, and can explore and explain the continuing proliferation risks of nuclear power, and of a plutonium fuel cycle other activities that further blur the boundaries between nuclear weapons and nuclear power production. Environmental lawyers can work to assure adequate review of all aspects of the new cycle from MOX production through transportation to nuclear waste storage. Groups and individuals attracted to electoral approaches can develop initiatives on everything from local nuclear-free zones to supporting candidates at every level. Between elections, they can query their local, state, and national officials about their responsibility to represent and protect their locale and its inhabitants. Groups interested in direct action can choose a variety of creative tactics to bring the continuing reality of the nuclear war in waiting home to people, now with a concrete focus supported by detailed local information (with local sources for new people and the media to talk to) and a growing set of organizations and styles of work where people can get involved. These too are just examples, which come to mind because they already are being done here and there, in the natural course of locally-rooted resistance to the activities of the nuclear weapons complex.

### **The failures of insider politics**

We should compare the capacity of this approach to make connections and involve a wide range of approaches and skills to the narrow set of tactics which have been prevalent over the past decade. I would characterize these approaches as having the following common characteristics:

- Actions focus on agendas cognizable by and acceptable for debate within the existing institutions of government, law, and science. Particularly where action is focused on national legislatures and officials, this means that both information and debate has from the outset been narrowed and abstracted by the purposes and imperatives of political and economic rule. What is important here is not that these institutions are engaged, but that their definitions of issues and how they can be described and discussed is accepted as a starting point, rather than seen as a temporary condition to be considered and dealt with from some broader conceptual and strategic perspective.
- Initiatives are presented to most participants (i.e. members of the public, including members of the organizations putting the initiatives forward) as a finished product, with whatever connections among issues there are to be made already present.
- There is a strong emphasis on influencing proposals generated within existing forums, as opposed to changing the framing of the debate as a whole.
- There is a strong tendency to believe that the conventional methods of advertising and public relations are useful in building a social movement attempting to transform a fundamental aspect of society in a nonviolent way.
- To the extent that there is any attempt to build a movement, it is for the most part through

large organizations, using a mass membership model in which the involvement of most members is limited to sending checks and writing letters to decision-makers in response to action alerts.

Single issue initiatives, most of which are reactive in character (trying to influence a particular legislative vote on an issue already framed in the legislative process—e.g. cutting particular projects from the budget) provide only a narrow range of activities in which people can engage. Most often, supporters are asked only to contact legislators— an activity which does little to develop skills or build community. The focus— and often, even the details— of the message, is predetermined, so there are few opportunities to reach new constituencies in a new way, where we discover our common concerns, and ways to do something about them, together. The result, in practice, usually is that the same (generally thinning and aging) population of full and part-time activists is dunned with an endless round of appeals to fax, write, and call legislators, but very little is done which is effective in increasing either the breadth or the depth of a movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Campaigns which do only this generally leave nothing more behind than they started with.

There also have been proposals for more ambitious “free standing” legislative initiatives — those which, for example, attempt to redirect large portions of military spending to social programs. Because such initiatives propose actions well outside the existing ambit of “mainstream” political debate, their chances for conventional success— being enacted into law— are minimal in the absence of a far broader social movement against militarism and for social justice and some measure of wealth redistribution than now exists. Hence their only value in the current moment is as an organizing tool, and they must be evaluated accordingly. At first look, such initiatives are somewhat more appealing than reactive legislative campaigns because they begin to make connections and provide a broader context. But they are presented to people and organizations largely as finished products, the connections already made. There is little opportunity to develop relationships on the local and regional level and to deepen understanding in the course of making the connections between the issues, particularly because the broad and abstract nature of such initiatives does little to explicate and increase awareness of the concrete manifestations of the nuclear weapons complex in immediately graspable ways. In the end, talking in billions remains abstract, whether we are discussing spending we favor or oppose. Here too, the range of skills and types of action which can be deployed is largely limited to episodic campaigns to contact legislators.

The point here is not that legislative initiatives never are worthwhile. Rather, it is to distinguish between building a movement and influencing the actions of the government. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. But in an historical moment when legislative bodies quite clearly are dominated by concentrated wealth and where the range of alternatives presented in policy debates often provides no alternatives which are acceptable, much less attractive, the utility of legislative initiatives as an organizing tool must be carefully thought through. There is great danger that we will endorse compromises which have dangerous long-term consequences (“Don’t



ask for what you don't want, because you might get it)." A prominent example is the implicit acceptance by many arms control organizations of a Comprehensive Test Ban package which included a profound and long-lasting re-commitment to nuclear weapons research and testing, and to institutions which help drive and sustain the arms race. (The nuclear weapons establishment got their payment up front; there may never be a CTBT.)

In addition, neither arcane compromises having no more (or less) internal logic than the current configuration of contending elites nor marginal tweaks to a system most of our likely allies find both incomprehensible and repugnant have much power to mobilize the as yet unorganized. Under current conditions, sending out "alerts" to existing lists of activists and telling them to tell their legislators to do something, or using mass media to tell people to tell their legislators to do something, is not a "grassroots strategy." It's like throwing grass seed on pavement, screaming "GROW" at it, and expecting a lawn to spring up. First you have to break up the concrete, add organic matter, and work the ground.

Legislative initiatives become meaningful for efforts which will require fundamental social change (as abolishing nuclear weapons does) when there is a strong movement, and seldom before. Once a broad-based coalition has been built, with relationships and a common understanding grounded in working together successfully on local and regional initiatives, legislative initiatives (even ones which may not be immediately "winnable") can help make a growing movement more visible, and can demonstrate its strength to decision makers. And if informed by years of coalition-building through connection-making, the legislative initiatives are likely to be better crafted, the opportunities for success better understood. Finally, with a substantial base of support in place, the "reactive," "defensive" legislative interventions which sometimes are necessary will have a greater chance for success. We will have a far better basis for understanding which ones are truly necessary, and with that understanding widely shared among groups who have developed a movement together, mobilizing ourselves for coordinated action also will become easier. But this means we must make what look like hard choices. We are going to have to stop merely reacting to many of the emergencies constantly generated by social institutions which are headed in the wrong direction. And we are going to have to stop looking for solutions to those emergencies within the "normal" practices of those institutions, and begin instead to think together about how we can really make them change course.

The variety of themes and actions which can be brought to bear when we connect nuclear weapons and the policies they incarnate within everyday life provide us with the chance for a genuine continuing conversation with our neighbors about what they find important, what moves them. The organizing approaches suggested here provide the opportunity for sustained discussions about how society really is organized, and about the role nuclear weapons play in the current violent and unjust order of things, as opposed to stereotypic, episodic "write a letter to your congressman about this outrage" interactions. I believe that in this way we can build the shared understanding and trust needed for the long struggle that nuclear abolition will entail, and can make working for nuclear abolition an integral part of the effort to build the movement for

broader social transformation which will be necessary for nuclear weapons abolition to become possible.

In successful organizing efforts, it often is hard to tell in advance what will strike a chord. This approach, grounded in many disparate efforts to place the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons within a broader movement for peace, social justice, and respect for the natural world, helps to ensure that we will try a variety of approaches. Those that work, because they have been discovered in the process of people working together, will be based in a broader politics which is internally consistent and which has broad and deep appeal.

### **Nonviolence and the politics of public relations**

The top-down techniques of advertising and public relations, in contrast, use focus groups and survey research to identify hot-button issues and images in order to determine the most effective ways to sell manageable bits and bytes of political imagery. By their very nature, these techniques cannot distinguish between a theme which is salient because it truly reflects the deepest interests and aspirations of the queried test subjects, and the leftover artifacts of someone else's successful propaganda campaign. Do we really believe that the prevalent rhetoric of weapons of mass destruction-wielding "rogue states" as the preeminent threat to our security, endlessly drummed into us by government spokespeople, militarist think-tanks, and the mass media, is either true, or is an idea that average Americans hold deeply, grounded in their own life experience?

If we are committed to nonviolence we must remember that is not just a tactic, but a commitment to treat others with respect in all things as best we can, to try to find ways to do our work which prefigure the social relations which would prevail in the kind of society we are trying to build. We should not use techniques of mass indoctrination which aim not at providing information and promoting open debate, but rather which aim to influence people in indirect, subliminal, and irrationalist ways. Such techniques both are ethically unacceptable and cannot accomplish our goals. Not only does the end not justify the means, but certain ends cannot be accomplished by certain kinds of means. A relationship is no stronger than the interactions which brought it into being.

Advertising, PR, and propaganda all are manipulations, ways of dealing with people which imply in their very structure that the first and often the only consideration is the interest of the purveyor. These modes of interaction by their very nature can not be equitable invitations to enter into discussions whereby we shape our future together; no matter how laudable our message is, they are attempts to control what other people think. Because of this, they cannot build trust, and certainly not the high degree of trust required by a social movement consisting of ordinary people who together must confront concentrated political and military force held by people who repeatedly have proven themselves willing to kill to defend their privilege.

Oversimplifications which do violence to complex truth in order to fit a sound-bite world, scare tactics used to punch through sensibilities already bludgeoned by media overload, the use of celebrities who are only superficially connected to our issue who are popular mainly because of prior corporate manipulations of inculcated images of sex and power: these methods may win a battle or two, but they legitimate the existence of war, of the use of one kind of power or another to bend others to our will. The Civil Rights movement was not built by public relations. The Farm Workers union was not built by propaganda. The path to abolition of nuclear weapons will not be advertised.

It is worse than useless to attempt to redirect fears which have been whipped up by sophisticated scare campaigns to justify a bloated military establishment after the primary visible threat (itself revealed in retrospect to have been inflated to a considerable degree for the same reasons) has disappeared. Any such attempt to shortcut the hard, long-term organizing work and alliance building that must be done is more likely to contribute further to a growing climate of hysteria, which those who sell more weapons as a “national security” panacea have shown themselves extremely adept at exploiting. Proceeding in this way may well build larger constituencies for ballistic missile defense, and even perhaps for nuclear weapons, which their purveyors already are working hard to recast as a regrettable but eternally necessary deterrent to “rogue” dictators allegedly armed, or who may some day be armed, with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

At best, this approach implicitly endorses a narrative in which nuclear weapons are unnecessary only because we can replace them with a dazzling variety of high-tech armaments, from ballistic missile defense to cruise missiles to high powered microwave weapons. This world view, and the policies it entails, undermine the possibility of nuclear weapons abolition on a world scale. We can see this already in the growing reluctance of other nations to continue arms control negotiations with a United States increasingly viewed as an unpredictable superpower— a power committed to unilateral action and bent on achieving the capacity to deploy overwhelming military force anywhere on the planet, its people listening to little but their bellicose mass media’s simplistic representations of the world as a place full of violent, irrational, and untrustworthy enemies.<sup>2</sup>

We don’t need to abandon the use of mass media altogether. In a country in which the community-based institutions of civil society have been severely eroded, we may not be able to build a movement solely through shoe leather organizing and face-to-face coalition building. But we must recognize that the “normal” forums of existing media outlets, dominated increasingly by

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<sup>2</sup> Demagoguery on foreign policy issues generally is the norm in national political debate. See, for example, leading presidential candidate George Bush, in a television ad: “Today we live in a world of terror, madmen and missiles. Our military is challenged by aging weapons and low morale. Because a dangerous world still requires a sharpened sword, I will rebuild our military.” Alan Elsner, Bush Outlines Foreign Policy Ideas Ahead of Speech Reuters Internet Politics Headlines, November 16, 1999.

concentrated corporate ownership, are structured in ways which often are incompatible with our beliefs and goals. They are not neutral purveyors of information. So we must choose our themes and our methods carefully, reflecting on what larger narratives our tactics implicitly assume or reinforce.

Abolition of nuclear weapons will not turn on the parochial debates of an American elite grown so powerful that it seems content to turn inward, to pursue its own court politics without regard for its effect on the rest of the world. There can be no progress on nuclear weapons abolition-- as embedded as nuclear weapons are in both the central institutions and the most powerful myths of U.S. national security policy-- until debate over U.S. policy has expanded beyond the short run interests of Washington power players and their monied primary constituencies to encompass not only the interests of ordinary U.S. citizens, but of every human being on the planet affected by an empire of unprecedented reach and apocalyptic power.

### **Where do we go from here?**

#### **The need for a clear message and a strong voice**

If we want to eliminate nuclear weapons, there must be a visible social movement articulating this demand in a clear, consistent, principled way. If we want the abolition of nuclear weapons, and believe that achieving it requires as well progress towards multilateral, nonviolent resolution of international disputes, increased economic and social justice, both within and among nations, and democratic control over technology choice, there must always be persuasive voices calling for these things, for they are very different from the way the world is, or the direction in which it is headed.

We may at particular moments seek to put the bulk of our energies into some narrower sub-goal, for example advocating or defending a particular treaty. But without the broader context of a movement for peace and justice, the mere promotion of a treaty or of a piece of national legislation has an ambiguous trajectory. Neither form of enactment, under anything like current conditions, will in the end be *our* instrument, have its terms defined with our meaningful participation and consent, and have its meaning interpreted and enforced by us in the last instance. The deals which may be cut, and the effects of the entire complex set of negotiations and power plays which will be implicated across society, are not under our control.

We often will find that there are elements in society who in the short run favor some of the same things that we do-- for example, military officers and national security officials and governments who will favor one or another arms control measure-- but who have no interest in disarmament, or in any significant change in the way disputes are resolved or the way society is ordered. They may see a treaty we consider to be a step towards disarmament as a part of an entirely different strategic path-- for example one in which the risk and expense of certain big power rivalries is reduced, in order to be able to focus military force more efficiently (and perhaps

to make force easier and less dangerous to deploy) in regional conflicts emerging out of intensifying global disparities of wealth. We are not pulling together with them in the same direction; we are working for fundamentally different outcomes, and the history to come will be some complex consequence of these and many other struggles. But they have in place already enormous cultural and political institutions which make their framing of the issues, and their vision of the possible paths forward, appear not as a proposal, but as The Future, a narrowly constrained set of inevitabilities to which we must respond.

Hence the problems we face are not merely strategic, in the sense of knowing which sub-goals to choose and when to ask for more or for less change. These matters are indeed important, and we should have a longer-term strategy which informs where we choose to put our energies. But when we choose to throw our still-modest social weight behind one or another initiative conventionally framed by the forums of states, without much more, we can do little to alter the direction of history. While we march or lobby for one or another small stabilization of the last century's balance of terror, those in and near power are pushing not only for new versions of old weapons systems, but for novel military technologies bringing unforeseen dangers and new instabilities. At the same time, they also are innovating in the social technologies of the new colonialism: the financial infrastructure of destabilizing rapid capital movement and IMF "discipline," with attention displaced from those who profit most to the captive sovereignties of ex-colonies eternally in debt. And all the while, the violence which comes with the accelerating dissolution of cultures, the displacement of peoples from the lands which sustained them so cash crops they can't afford can be grown for a global market, and the poverty of billions amidst glittering displays of excess for the wealthy, is busily re-presented to us as something we are merely "responding to" and must "manage" through yet more violence, as the necessary suppression of barbarism's inexplicable resistance to modernity, expressed here as "terrorism" and there as "rogue states."

### **The need for an international perspective and an international movement**

The persistence of immense nuclear arsenals and hi-tech arms races after the Cold War is only a symptom. Addressing the causes will require a perspective which moves beyond arms control to broader demands for peace, including calls both for multilateral, nonviolent solutions of international disputes and for the dismantling of the enormous institutions which were spawned by and have helped sustain the arms races of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It does not appear likely that the populations of the most militarized states, and in particular the nuclear superpowers, will be able to make substantial progress towards changing the role of their nations' militaries in society and in the world without help. The ability to sustain and use technologically sophisticated military force is a central, defining characteristic of the most powerful states. The interdependent institutions of force and the small parts of the population which benefit from the skewed distribution of wealth and power which those institutions maintain not only benefit materially in the short run from the existing order of things; they are dependent for their very identity on the roles and modes of deploying social power which keep this "order" in place.

If we are to broaden the peace movement to the extent that will be necessary to achieve progress towards abolition of nuclear weapons, we must develop a disarmament discourse which is less tied to the conventionally-articulated “security interests” of individual states, and which can be linked to and grounded more firmly in the social movements which form the basis for a nascent international “civil society.” Only people in the sectors of society not dependent for their identities, their privilege, or their livelihood on the armed bureaucracies of the high technology military-industrial powers, people working together across the boundaries of the now existing states against militarism and the injustices it everywhere serves, can truly imagine a future different from the violent world of today, and can find together and in each other the courage and the social power to bring about the great changes which must be made if we are to survive.

The growing awareness and urgency in recent years concerning the issue of nuclear abolition among some elite groups both outside and within the nuclear weapons states is important and welcome. Recent initiatives by nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s) acting together with leading non-nuclear weapons states to push for more rapid progress on nuclear disarmament, for example, provide both short-run opportunities to limit the continuing arms race and the potential, perhaps, for a chance to work over the long run with and on governments and elites less firmly entrenched in the structures and culture of militarism. But it is the movements of ordinary people against militarism and weapons of mass destruction, sustained across decades, which in the end represent the political counterbalance to the concentrated power of those with vested interests in large standing militaries, vast armaments industries, and the constant refinement of weaponry.

### **Building a movement in unpredictable times**

Abolition of nuclear weapons probably will take many years, and a movement of the magnitude of the anti-Vietnam War movement or the Civil Rights movement. This movement most likely will be quite different from either prior effort. The movement which creates the conditions for the elimination of nuclear weapons will most likely not be constructed solely, or even primarily, around abolition. There are ways in which our circumstances today are more difficult— primarily due to the continuing erosion of the face-to-face, locally-rooted institutions of civil society in which the Civil Rights movement in particular was grounded. But there are also new opportunities, with international networks of NGO’s already working on a number of related issues, aided to some degree by new means of communication. The kinds of actions suggested here provide ways to build anew the local organizations and relationships needed for a long-term campaign, and to reach out to parallel efforts which seek to link the local to the global, and to give a real voice in the remote decision-making forums to the people and places which will feel the effects. These elements are essential, I believe, to building a sustained anti-nuclear weapons movement, and to making connections with emerging, broader movements against militarism and violence deployed in defense of an unjust and unsustainable global economic and political order.

Prospects for nuclear weapons abolition are likely to change quickly only if something

happens which greatly increases general public awareness of nuclear weapons and of the threat they and other hi-tech armaments pose. Conceivable events of this kind— a sharp and sudden increase in tensions among nuclear armed powers, or, worst of all, the actual use of nuclear weapons— are at least as likely to cause severe setbacks for nuclear disarmament as they are to improve prospects. Any such crisis will be accompanied by ceaseless demands from every military and weapons contractor “spokesperson,” and from most elected politicians, dutifully amplified by the mainstream media, for intensified militarization, for more “national security.”

At such times, even a partially-constructed movement provides nodes to organize around. It is particularly valuable under such circumstances to have groups already in place, with a visible, trusted local presence, which are espousing a genuinely alternative interpretation of how the world works and where we should be going. Also of central importance are nonviolent coalitions with the mutual trust and strength to survive in a climate of heightened repression, which almost certainly would accompany any conceivable scenario in which the threat of nuclear weapons use increases significantly. Episodic, top-down public relations-style campaigns, electorally and legislatively focused, create few such organizing nodes. Furthermore, campaigns for nuclear weapons abolition which seek to capture public attention primarily by stoking fears of attack by other nuclear weapons powers or demonized terrorists and “rogue states” are likely only to provide fertile ground and further resonance for intensified national security hysteria in a time of crisis.

## Refocusing our energies and restructuring our organizations

In a recent discussion of these issues, someone said to me that connections between the nuclear weapons complex and our everyday existence can't be found everywhere. But if we look carefully, the impacts of our half century arms race can be found in every city and town in the United States.

So we must ask ourselves why we don't know they are there. In part, it is because many arms control and disarmament groups either always have had, or have moved to, approaches which are almost exclusively "center focused"-- aimed in both their analysis and their actions at the executive and legislative branches of the government, and deriving most of the information on which their analyses and strategy choices are based from documents and other sources generated by the higher levels of government bureaucracies (budget documents, high level policy papers, and the like). The information gleaned from these sources has been selected principally to serve strategies aimed at getting individual supporters to pressure decision-makers of the center by individual expressions of opinion-- mail, calls, faxes, perhaps at most showing up at local appearances of federal officials and elected representatives. Information that government bureaucracies collect and synthesize for use at the highest levels of decision-making typically been selected, abstracted, and pre-screened to serve ends already determined by those in power. Detailed, and negative, information about the social and ecological impacts of government programs is highly unlikely to remain, and if it does, in most instances it is because some locally-rooted group has worked hard to keep it there. There has been little effort from most groups which have substantial resources to research concrete local and regional manifestations of the nuclear weapons complex and to use that information to make connections among issues and build broader coalitions. It is no accident that much of the detailed information about the operations of the nuclear weapons complex, and much of the scattered efforts at local and regional coalition building, have come from groups based in areas where the concrete manifestations of the nuclear weapons enterprise have remained most visible.

Taking the concrete manifestations of our continuing national commitment to nuclear weapons as our starting point and focus both for analysis and action allows a wide spectrum of activity, both in styles and skills and in politics. Diversity in sub-strategies is a strength, and approaches often viewed as incompatible can in fact be complementary. More confrontational approaches-- for example, approaches aimed at making individual and corporate responsibility for our nuclear weapons policies and their consequences immediately visible to affected communities, can help shift the boundaries of debate so that more incremental efforts have a greater chance for success.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For examples of this in work on corporate accountability, see Robin Broad and John Cavanagh, "The Corporate Accountability Movement: Lessons and Opportunities," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, v.23 #2 (Fall 1999), pp. 151, 163-4.



But we cannot be content to continue along our current path, reassuring ourselves that we already have diverse approaches and that everything is OK. In arms control and disarmament work, a disproportionate amount of energy and resources over the past decade has gone into attempts to identify and institutionalize some kind of compromise arms reduction consensus in Congress, apparently based on the belief that somehow everyone already can see, and agree on, the irrefutable rationality of a steady reduction in nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, visible U.S. commitment and congressional support for virtually every major nuclear arms control regime has steadily eroded, and the prospects for a stable test ban and nonproliferation regime, much less elimination of nuclear weapons, have declined steadily as a consequence. All that has been successfully institutionalized is a commitment to a modernized, immensely sophisticated nuclear weapons research, testing, and production complex. This is not progress. Rather than chasing a rightward-running “center,” it is time to find a way to change the basic parameters of debate. This means for the immediate future shifting a substantial portion of our resources and energies away from Washington, away from electoral and legislative forums, and towards building a movement of millions which those who hold or seek power cannot ignore.

### **What types of activities and goals should we consider?**

Local and regional groups should put more of their energies into identifying local manifestations of the nuclear weapons complex and recognizing connections to other issues, and by doing so finding and reaching out to new allies. A local group could, for example, set itself a six month target of forging three new organizational relationships, each strengthened by at least one common action. To find these manifestations, we can study the military activities and contracts of major local and regional institutions. These can be corporations and universities as well as government agencies and military facilities. In the process we should try to get a broad sense of what the dominant institutions in our locales are doing, in order to identify potential common themes and alliances.

At public universities, for example, we can find research agendas dominated by the interests of corporations and the military, ranging from computer science department involvement in nuclear weapons supercomputing research programs to agriculture schools concentrating on factory farming and pesticide research to life sciences departments researching bioengineering techniques which will primarily benefit corporations seeking genetically engineered crops. In all instances, research agendas supported by public dollars are being set with little public knowledge or input, with affected publics ranging from consumers to farm workers exposed to pesticides to students who receive less faculty time in big science research-driven universities. A common demand to take back our public universities, and to democratize the way research agendas are set, can bring a wide range of groups together with a common focus.

Many of these particular issues already are the focus of local and regional organizations and campaigns, and hence have constituencies of their own. But they seldom are brought

together in campaigns focused on locally visible institutions in a way which makes manifest both the connections between issues which at first seem to affect only some of us, and the deeper inequities which will have to be addressed if we are to achieve democratic control over decisions which affect us all.

In researching corporations which are nuclear weapons contractors, we should examine not only their local but their global social and environmental impacts. Many large defense contractors do projects which can be connected to the fundamental interests which drive foreign and military policies that require the ability to project overwhelming force to protect “economic interests” anywhere on the planet. Companies which do large scale military construction and engineering at home, for example, also may do similar projects overseas, as well as large development projects (e.g. dams) which displace populations and disrupt local social, economic, and ecological systems without the consent of those affected. These issues allow us to work in coalition with global human rights, ecology, and economic justice groups-- including the growing corporate accountability movement, a diverse set of actors with labor, environmental, economic justice, human rights, and democratization concerns, already acting on levels from the local to the global.

If lacking the resources and expertise to research their regional institutions as well as they would like, local groups can reach out to regional and national groups, and vice versa. This provides new opportunities to work together, and to develop potentially fruitful ways of integrating the rich local knowledges of people who have an intimate understanding of their social and ecological surroundings, and immediate experience of the effects that the institutions of the arms race have had on their communities and their lands. National groups, conversely, can redirect resources into helping to discover and understand the impacts of our half-century commitment to nuclear weapons, and its proliferating effects on all the workings of a complex modern society. This cannot be effective if done as a think-tank exercise, far from the places where the social and ecological impacts are felt. It may require that national entities build or rebuild local or regional chapters or offices structured in a way that expertise is dispersed and embedded in local contexts, with more locally responsive decision making. This would allow national organizations to work both more closely and more equitably with local groups, and would create a context in which people with professional training and skills can learn to understand, take seriously, and learn from “local knowledges,” perhaps in the long run leading to genuinely new ways of understanding the complex workings of social and ecological systems.

### **What types of structure should our national efforts have?**

The model for the kind of alliance we need can best be experimented with and built locally and regionally at the outset. The type of discussion which can build both trust and a shared understanding of how social change can happen (even if not agreement in all things), can only emerge in face-to-face relationships and sustained experience working together. Both trust and a

shared understanding of how social change occurs are necessary conditions for a broad-based strategy for fundamental social change which can be sustained over the long run. Everything in the structure of national political work in its predominant current forms cuts against this-- the professionalized, single-issue focus, the episodic, reactive rhythms of the work and of shifting temporary alliances, all dictated by struggles within the ruling elites which national groups and campaigns for the most part try to redirect a little bit this way or that. Local and regional work is less constrained by both the form and the content of our narrow national politics; there is more room for innovation on all fronts. The natural tendency for locally-grounded coalitions to fit their strategies to their circumstances also is likely to result in a variety of approaches. By seeing what works and what doesn't under different conditions, and having in place the institutional means to compare experiences more systematically (and not just abstractly but experientially, for example through organizer exchanges), we further improve our ability to think collectively about strategies.

There are additional reasons why we should go slow on stronger national ties, and why effective national campaigns and organizations are likely to follow at least a few stronger regional alliances as both example and sub-component. The level of commitment required for binding national decision making within a campaign or organization has different impacts for different types and scales of groups. For smaller and grassroots groups it can amount to a critical "existential" commitment, while for larger groups (often with more diverse programs) it can be a proportionally far smaller and less risky commitment. At the same time, the national groups easily can dominate. Consequently, a premature consolidation of local, national, and regional elements into a tightly structured national entity or campaign is likely to preserve current power relations and to reproduce the same types of strategies already being pursued by the largest organizations. As a consequence, there is not enough trust for local and grassroots organizations to submit to broadly binding obligations with large national organizations, particularly with the level of political agreement still so unclear.

Because there are likely to be some national issues which we wish to address and emergencies which we wish to respond to even in the short run, we nonetheless are likely to need some type of national structure for communicating, meeting, supporting each other's work, and sharing information. In this regard, the form chosen by the new U.S. Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, a network with some small level of staff focused on network maintenance and supporting the work of the individual network member groups, seems an appropriate starting point. Within this type of format, there can be agreement to fund activities which enhance strategy discussion and the work of both individual organizations and local or regional alliances. These include funding meeting attendance for groups and population sectors with less resources, facilitating organizer exchanges, having network meetings concurrently with major local or regional events and activities to add visibility and resources to such events, and hiring staff to assist in these activities and in the substantial administrative work of sustaining a useful and lively national network. None of these require a fundamental kind or degree of commitment (in the

sense that an individual organization's existence may ride on the choice). In addition, a network of this kind can encompass a fairly wide range of organizational forms and political approaches, so long as there is agreement on internal decision making and the fundamental direction of the common program. Finally, many local and regional organizations working on nuclear weapons issues and on related military and environmental issues already work in networks of this type, and hence are familiar and comfortable with the form.

The United States is a very big place. Looking back through social movement history, we are likely to find that many, if not most, U.S. social movements began as regional movements, with the national movement now perceived retrospectively as an inevitable development having come together (or been cobbled together, often with much friction), from somewhat disparate elements, often with distinct regional and sectoral identities. We can learn some lessons from this history about how to avoid crippling splits, but no single program and organizing style can be imposed from the outset. Our diversity in race, class, politics, and culture, even within the relatively narrow confines of the anti-nuclear weapons movement, is not a goal, it is a fact. Building a movement in which this diversity becomes a source of strength, rather than division, resentment, and weakness, is a necessity.

### **The Bomb's two bodies**

The above suggestions are just examples, provisional sketches for a re-balancing of our efforts. And this may seem like an overly ambitious program for what many seem to consider a "single issue" campaign. But nuclear weapons and the institutions which have spawned and sustain them exercise a power over our global society, both corporeal and imaginary, which makes them an apt metaphor and entry point for the locked-up politics of our time, and which requires us to address fundamental questions of power, justice, and social structure if we are to find the path to their abolition. We have a long way to go, and no where to start but where we live.