Breakthrough

Emerging New Thinking

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Soviet and Western Scholars Issue a Challenge to Build a World Beyond War

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Dedication

To our children and grandchildren

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Nuclear Revolution and the New Way of Thinking

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Today we are often reminded of Albert Einstein's words: "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our ways of thinking." Also we are reminded that the birth and development of nuclear weapons has drastically changed the conditions of human existence. These weapons have necessitated not only new norms of behavior in international relations but new principles of thinking relevant to the realities of the nuclear age. (1)

Unprecedented Task

But do we also realize that this is an unprecedented and difficult task which involves a resolute break with many historical, political, psychological, and ideological traditions that come from prenuclear times? Not only people, but whole societies carry with them the burden of the past, and eliminating it is usually a difficult and painful job. A great deal in our political traditions – in all their diversity – constitute a serious obstacle to adopting new political thinking.

Becoming conscious of the radical changes in the world demands not only political courage, but a certain degree of emotional readiness. This

requires mental effort along with substantial psychological reorientation. This, then, is a task for all of us who were raised in the traditions of the past, and are often inclined to consider such traditions as being the only norm. (2)

The difficulty of this task is also due to the fact that on the journey to new political thinking there are not only "visible" political and ideological obstacles but "invisible" barriers as well.

These are the psychological and emotional barriers which are a result of the natural reluctance of the human mind to accept change. Such psychological defense is often intellectually attractive, saving one the trouble of thinking through the difficult problems of the nuclear age, and instead permitting one to use well-known ideas and concepts.

The New Era

The starting point here should be coming to grips with the fact that new types of weapons of mass destruction have divided human history in two periods – prenuclear and nuclear. Many ideas that were normal in the prenuclear age turn out to be absolutely unacceptable in the nuclear age. Many traditional categories of politics now do not make sense or have substantially changed their meaning. War and peace, victory and defeat, superiority and vulnerability, menace and security, strategy and force, balance and stability – these and many other concepts are acquiring new meaning today.

Moreover, the nuclear era is seriously changing the very notion of logic and rationality inherited from the past. The use of political ideas and concepts of the prenuclear era today become almost pseudorational. Formerly everything seemed logical, but today it is in essence absolutely senseless. The gap between technical and scientific development and the level of human thinking has created drastic changes in the world. These often force us to use ideas that are hopelessly outdated, even though we are already living under conditions where traditional political thinking becomes unavoidably contradictory. It becomes contradictory and irrational because it fails to come to grips with the new reality. Being rational only in form creates an illusory picture of the world and dictates solutions and actions which are dysfunctional. (3)

Nuclear Realities

So we are faced with the necessity of bringing our concepts and ideas in accord with the new realities of the nuclear age and the revolutionary change it has produced in the world. By mentioning revolutionary change we are not just making sensational exaggerations. We have all the reasons which qualify the nuclear revolution as a break with past traditions. The

revolution demands a serious reestimation of many, if not all, our political concepts, first of all those related to the problems of war and peace.

The importance of problems of war and peace can be explained by the fact that the threat of war has acquired a qualitatively new dimension. Although the prevention of nuclear war is the primary aim of Soviet and American national policy, it, of course, does not exclude other national goals. However, the problem of preventing nuclear doomsday has today a great significance of its own and is of the utmost importance in the list of national priorities. This issue has become the specific context for all other major problems of today. (In this sense one can say that problems of war and peace and other global issues have become indivisible.)

"... for the first time in history, the decision for total nuclear suicide can not only be made, but can be implemented by a relatively small group of people."

The nuclear revolution has ended the limits of the destructive capacity of weapons of mass destruction and has ended the possibilities of traditional defense against them. For the first time in human history, war with the use of nuclear weapons threatens to become not genocide but omnicide – total extermination of humanity. For the first time, the potential of mutually assured destruction has been acquired. This eliminates any possibility for the aggressor to win, even in a hypothetical situation. The military arsenals are ready for immediate use, and no mobilization or restructuring of industry is needed to begin a war. And for the first time in history, the decision for total nuclear suicide can not only be made, but can be implemented by a relatively small group of people.

Previously the problems of war and peace generally concerned relations between particular states, nations, classes, or social groups. Today for the first time they have become a global problem for all of civilization.

History becomes world history little by little. In a positive sense, this global character consists of economic, political, and spiritual interdependence. But in the case of the nuclear threat, the global character of human history acquires a negative connotation in the sense that the possibility exists for the destruction of human history itself. In this same negative sense, the nuclear revolution and the threats it entails has united human civilization to a greater extent than even the internationalization of the economic process, the growth of interdependence, or the development of mass communications - all of which could perish in nuclear war.

In prenuclear times nations and peoples perished in wars, but this did not stop the natural thrust of historical development in general. Nuclear war,

however, poses a threat of a dramatically different kind – it brings into question the future of the linear development of human society, the vectoral direction of history. In apocalyptic stories of the past, "the end of the world" usually occurred simultaneously with the "beginning" of a transition into some higher quality. But nuclear apocalypse is not a beginning of anything else, it is just the "end" of history, the end of everything. (4)

Military Force and Politics

It has already been noted that nuclear revolution has totally changed the nature and character of war. Nuclear war or the threat of nuclear war can no longer serve as a means of resolving international, social, political, or ideological conflicts or contradictions. The traditional correlation between the objectives and the means of war becomes senseless. War with the use of nuclear weapons can no longer be considered a rational continuation of "politics by other means."

"Under these new conditions, an increase in military power does not enhance security, but, on the contrary, undermines it."

The task of reevaluating many concepts and ideas which have become outdated due to the nuclear revolution concerns a whole spectrum of key military and political categories. First of all is the question of the correlation between military force and politics. The change in character of war engendered by the nuclear revolution must be analyzed in its global context – the changing role of force and the threat of force in achieving political ends. The nuclear revolution brings into being a paradox of security by turning upside down the traditional correlation between a nation's military force and its security. Under these new conditions, an increase in military power does not enhance security, but, on the contrary, undermines it. Moreover, the political influence of a country on the international scene is no longer directly related to its military potential. The military force of a nation cannot be equated with the quantity and quality of its nuclear potential because that potential cannot be implemented in practice – neither in a direct military sense nor for achieving political aims.

The determining factor of the above-mentioned shift in the relationship between military force and politics is the total vulnerability created by the nuclear revolution – the inability to defend oneself against the threat of nuclear destruction by the use of any technical or military device. This is why the concept of national security has so dramatically changed. In the first place, security is relative since under the circumstances no nation, not even the strongest militarily or otherwise, can assure itself absolute security

considering the total vulnerability brought about by the nuclear revolution. In the second place, one-way security is impossible. It is unachievable without substantial political cooperation and mutual understanding with the adversary.

The Security Dilemma

Before the nuclear revolution, nations were encouraged to deal with the so-called "security dilemma." In essence, the efforts of any state to increase its security, no matter what its subjective intentions, often objectively result in diminishing the security of others. In other words, the stronger a state became militarily – the more it strengthened its own security by one-way military measures – the more vulnerable and less secure were its potential adversaries. But the nuclear revolution has given this security dilemma a qualitatively new dimension.

The situation of total vulnerability, once created, is irreversible. It cannot be changed by any military efforts, defensive efforts included. The scientific and technical development of defensive weapons cannot eliminate the fundamental fact of the nuclear revolution – the vulnerability of the nation's territory and its civilian and industrial centers to the possible nuclear attack. Under the circumstances, the assurance of even relative security becomes militarily impossible.

Mutual vulnerability deters actions which could definitely lead to a military conflict. Moreover, vulnerability and constant potential menace to one's security deter not only direct nuclear attack but also actions which under other circumstances could lead to escalation of conflict. It is significant that in the past the uncertainty factor related to war often stimulated aggression. But under the nuclear revolution, that uncertainty, the unpredictability of possible escalation, becomes a deterring factor.

In this sense, the weapons created by the nuclear revolution are not strictly speaking military weapons, since under no hypothetical situation can they be used to achieve those aims which used to be achievable with the help of weapons. The concept of force acquires special ambiguity in relation to nuclear weapons: weapons are capable of destroying but are incapable of assuring traditional political influence. In any event, with the "nuclear revolution" the interrelation between military force and political influence ceased to be simple and linear. After a certain point, any increase in the capability to destroy becomes excessive and cannot be used for political goals.

Offense versus Defense

The nuclear revolution has destroyed the traditional competition between offensive and defensive means. It has established forever the superiority of

offensive weapons. Thus all efforts to create a defense against nuclear weapons in the usual sense are meaningless. This leads to a phenomenon unknown in human history. Now the mutual possession of nuclear offensive weaponry makes both sides equally defenseless. This phenomenon becomes one of the crucial factors in creating, again for the first time in history, a real strategic dead end – one that eliminates any sense of the traditional concepts of military strategy and the use of military means for achieving specific aims.

"... the acquisition of military superiority has no military significance . . . no relationship to real security."

Total vulnerability eliminates the traditional rationale for the idea of "defense" by devaluating it. Defense in the sense of assuring national security ceases to be military in nature and becomes instead a political and a psychological problem. Total vulnerability means that the acquisition of military superiority has no military significance, it has no relationship to real security. Hence the notion of superiority or vulnerability now lacks meaning in the traditional sense.

Nuclear weapons create another paradox – the contradiction between their enormous destructive force on the one hand and the incapacity to totally destroy the adversary's nuclear potential on the other. That gives the enemy a guaranteed possibility of launching a second strike to exterminate the "winner" even after he himself was hypothetically "defeated." This brings into existence a new strategic situation without a traditional military meaning. In prenuclear times one army could defeat another and impose on the loser its political will. However, nuclear weapons with all their destructive power cannot assure "victory."

Another fact deserves attention: To search for practical technological solutions to existing problems now contradicts reality since those solutions no longer work. The understanding of this dilemma often entails psychological tension and a search for some way out of the dead end, even if illusory. One of the common reactions to this new situation is the effort to get rid of the sense of nuclear vulnerability by spending resources on various technological projects by reviving "defense" in its traditional meaning. But in practice, all attempts to create a universal defense against nuclear weapons (either in space or by civil defense) are in essence the same efforts to get rid of the painful feeling of total vulnerability. New norms of political rationality in the nuclear age make the principle of zero-sum game in international relations meaningless especially in relations with a potential adversary. The traditional political principle that says "what is bad for the enemy is good for us" has become hopelessly outdated.

Deep modifications of the "image of the enemy" are urgently needed. We need a new attitude about our adversary – not only political but psychological and emotional as well. Psychologically this may be one of the hardest tasks. This will be particularly difficult due to deeply rooted ethnic, sociopsychological, political, or ideological prejudices but also due to the arms race which is in itself a source of misperceptions. "Absolute" weapons need an "absolute" enemy who would be so "evil" that the use of these weapons would be morally and psychologically justifiable. (5)

Dehumanization of the enemy and its perception as an "absolute evil" is extremely dangerous in our present situation. It is very important and necessary today to avoid situations where the adversary could feel insecure, unsure, or vulnerable. The feeling of security of the other side is as important today as the preservation of one's own security. A new concept of common human faith should be based on this principle of internationalization of national interest, which is an outgrowth of giving top priority to global human needs and interests.

The paradoxes and dilemmas of the nuclear age undermine traditional political thinking and lead to unresolvable contradictions which cannot be overcome in the framework of old political logic.

But are such radical changes in our way of thinking possible at all, and what are the obstacles in the way?

Yes, the changes are possible and the obstacles are numerous. First, there are political and ideological obstacles, such as the resistance of those who quite consciously, due to specific interests, are against the new thinking. But there are also psychological obstacles which are not always fully realized. (6)

In great measure, these obstacles are produced by the fact that our thinking processes work in accordance with traditional perceptions and tend to elaborate their own psychological defense against the new reality too painful for it to face. These mechanisms of defense create an illusory psychological calmness and block consciousness. This results in a sort of "psychological deafness."

In human perception, one of the most common forms of resistance to nuclear realities is conventionalization of nuclear weapons, a tendency to perceive them as "usual" but more powerful, as weapons which can be dealt with by traditional military and political means. Such conventionaliz-ation can be attractive psychologically and intellectually because it forces out of the mind information which is too painful. It permits us to use well-known concepts and categories which were applied successfully in the past. (7)

Another form of resistance is the appeal to ideological absolutism and purism. This is when one declares abstract, absolute ideological goals that allow us to not face the realities of the nuclear age. Here, in particular, we

see modern variations of a "crusade" or "holy war," ideology extremely dangerous in the nuclear age.

The military-technological fetish is another variation of resistance when people avoid accepting radical changes now called for by the nuclear revolution. This resistance takes the form of using refinements of technological development – an increase in accuracy, invention of smaller warheads, and other improvements so that nuclear weapons can once again acquire "military" feasibility. An example of such a "fetish" is the idea of creating an exotic technology of "space defense" against nuclear weapons.

"... there exists another serious obstacle on the way to creating this new thinking. . . between rhetoric and action . . . there is danger that 'new thinking' will become only a cliché."

Tendencies to think in old political categories are evident in cases where the absolute parameters of nuclear weapons are ignored. A glaring example is in negotiations where we are still discussing the number of warheads, their accuracy, time of reaching the target, the number of targets, and their defense. What should openly be declared now is the absence of limits on the destructive power of nuclear weapons, the fact that both sides are totally vulnerable, and that projects to assure absolute security are unrealistic. (3)

Among unconscious psychic mechanisms of resistance one should mention semantic traps, that is, linguistic formulas of artificial "nuclear esperanto" that in practice have no relation to nuclear reality but nevertheless are proposed for dealing with it. For example, when we hear such phrases as nuclear exchange, escalation, counterforce, window of vulnerability, or nuclear umbrella, we must realize that these are euphemisms that create an illusion of rationality for a situation which, in essence, lacks all rationality.

Comprehension of the nature of the nuclear revolution is a most important precondition for a transition toward the new paradigms of thought we now need in order to survive. But there exists another serious obstacle on the way to creating this new thinking. That is the gap between rhetoric and action when grand declarations about the necessity of new thinking are made simultaneously with totally unchanging behavior. It is when old politics are justified by new rhetorical assurances. If this persists, there is danger that "new thinking" will become only a cliché.

At the same time one should note a certain "schizophrenia" of the old thinking. On the one hand it seems to accept the fact that nuclear weapons are not weapons in a traditional sense, and in respect to these weapons

traditional ways of thinking and behaving have lost their meaning. But on the other hand it continues to regard nuclear weapons as if they were conventional ones. This is done in order to create an impression about one's firmness and decisiveness in the enemy's eyes, in order to press the other side politically and psychologically. (8)

In other words, obstacles to new political thinking are numerous and diverse. But by not overcoming these obstacles, we are left with the dead end created by old political thinking and behavior. This could also lead to a continuation of the escalation of tension in Soviet-American relations which, in turn, could result in disaster.

It is important to understand that we cannot elude this dead end with the help of technology. The very problem of the nuclear revolution is not primarily a military one. That is why there is no hope for some "miracle" in the field of new weapons or in the field of arms control.

Another approach is more realistic: Only by a radical change in the political and psychological climate in Soviet-American relations can we promote arms control and diminish our common nuclear danger.

That is why relaxing tension in the world, eliminating hostility, and developing confidence between countries and peoples are tasks that are comparable in significance with the task of disarmament. These are the most important elements in developing new political thinking in Soviet-American relations.

This is certainly a distant goal on a long road. But this is also the most noble and most practical course for the human species.

April 1987 meeting, Ben Lomond, California.

Bottom row, left to right: Alexander Nitkin, Ross Lavroff, Martin Hellman, Elena Loshchenkova, Anatoly Gromyko, Kenneth Boulding, Sergei Kapitza.

Second row: William Busse, Linn Sennott, Harold Sandler, John Richardson, Steven Kull.

Third row: Theodore Taylor, Donald Fitton, Andrei Melville, William McGlashon, Jerome Frank, Richard Lagerstrom, Craig Barnes.

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