

FROM ARMS RACE to PEACE CONVERSION

A proposal for study
and action

May 1976

This year Congress approved every Pentagon request for new weapons. The arms race, in nuclear and conventional weapons, continues and intensifies. It is being pursued at great costs:

- * the distortion of national priorities.
- * an ever-increasing risk of nuclear disaster.
- * the perpetuation of dictatorships and poverty abroad.

What is the nature of the arms race?

What forces are behind it?

What alternative, life-affirming choices could our country make?

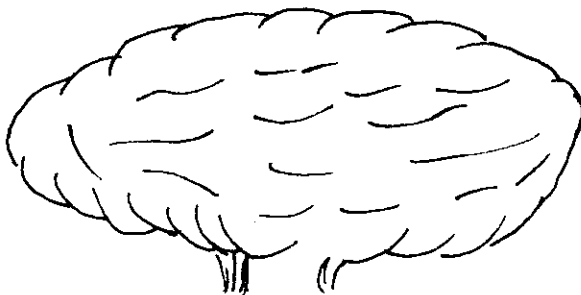
These are critical questions for our continued survival.

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THE MASSIVE SCALE OF NORTH AMERICAN ARMAMENTS

The most destructive existing weapons are nuclear. The U.S. is constantly improving its nuclear warheads and delivery systems. Recent developments include:

- + the Trident, a new missile-launching submarine which is already in production. The missiles carried by a single Trident could kill over 100 million people.
- + the B-1 Bomber, the Air Force's proposed replacement for the B-52. Funding for the B-1 is still pending in Congress. The B-1 will carry twice as much as the B-52; fly at supersonic speed; carry the fanciest electronics to be had; and cost about \$92 billion over the next 30 years if the proposed fleet of 244 bombers is built.
- + the Cruise Missile, currently being developed. It is a remote-controlled aircraft to be carried in large numbers by surface ships and jumbo jets.

All of these are simply vehicles for the nuclear explosives: 8,000 strategic and 22,000 tactical warheads at present, constituting together the equivalent of 589,000 Hiroshima bombs. Maintaining and improving the U.S. nuclear arsenal will cost us \$24 billion in 1976.

Current arms control talks offer little hope of serious reductions in the U.S. and Soviet arsenals. The Vladivostok agreement, for instance, will permit U.S. and Soviet nuclear capacity each to double over the next ten years. This is controlled mutual escalation, not reduction. The Non-Proliferation Treaty has been equally ineffective, largely because of the export of "peaceful" nuclear technology which is easily converted into the ability to build bombs. In the next 20 years, dozens of countries can have nuclear weapons if they choose to.

\$24,000,000,000

Our government is also building more and better conventional weapons. The B-1, for instance, is a conventional as well as a nuclear weapon. If it is ever used, it would be in Vietnam style wars, where its speed and sophistication would make it far more lethal than the B-52. We are even, according to the Pentagon budget proposal for this year, continuing development of chemical warfare agents.

The U.S. actively sponsors the arms race abroad, as well. Overseas sales of U.S. arms will total \$12 billion in FY 1976, according to *Defense Marketing Survey*. These weapons, sold in most cases to pro-U.S. dictatorships, use up resources needed for basic survival in poor countries, bolster repressive governments, and increase the risk of war. In the Middle East, we are arming both sides, providing both Israel and Arab nations with planes, missiles, and nuclear technology. Each move we make is justified on the basis that it redresses an imbalance of power which might lead to war. But in fact, by increasing the level of arms we have probably made war more likely, and any war which does come will be far more destructive than it would have been without our intervention.



UNITED STATES POLICY ON THE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

In the past two years, there have been disturbing signs of a more belligerent nuclear policy. President Ford and other high officials have acknowledged that our government is willing to be the *first* to use nuclear weapons in some kinds of conflict which might arise. Defense Secretaries Schlesinger and Rumsfeld have spoken of the possibility of "limited" nuclear war -- for which they want us to be prepared by having *flexible nuclear options*; that is, the capacity to make any kind or size of nuclear attack. The Pentagon has also proposed a program to evacuate citizens to mine shafts during international crises.

These statements probably mean that nuclear war is more likely than a few years ago. But the government regarded nuclear weapons as an offensive force, not just a deterrent, long before. According to a Library of Congress study, U.S. policy since 1945 has always been that we would be prepared to be the first country to use nuclear weapons. This policy has been accepted by both parties, every President and every major politician, even those considered peace-minded. It is based on a perspective which views any use of violence, even use of nuclear weapons, as justifiable if needed to fulfill national policy goals. This perspective cannot be squared with the witness of Jesus and the Gospel.

U.S. nuclear policy is not, however, oriented toward winning an all-out nuclear war. Our government has promised that we will never make an all-out attack, called a *first strike*, in which we try to destroy all the enemy's nuclear weapons. Rather, we try to maintain a balance of terror, called *mutual assured destruction*, in which each side can destroy the other and therefore nuclear weapons will hopefully never be used. But we continue to develop more lethal weapons, and are willing to risk nuclear war at crisis points. Such a policy provides us no real security, but instead the likelihood that sooner or later a situation will get out of control and result in nuclear war. For us, let alone the rest of humankind, the nuclear arms race is literally a dead end.

WHAT FUELS THE ARMS RACE?

The government invests such massive resources in weapons because they serve important purposes for groups within U.S. society.

Deterrence. Most people in this country believe that nuclear weapons will deter attack on the U.S. and our closest allies. Although this may be true, deterrence explains only part of our investment in nuclear arms. We have far more bombs than are needed to deter. For instance, we can already destroy every major Soviet city 27 times over. Furthermore, our feeling of insecurity in having so many enemies around the world is no accident. It comes partly from our choice to help maintain an unjust world order.

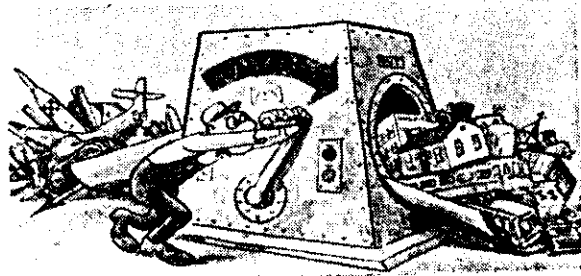
Avoiding depression. Without federal deficits and high levels of government spending, we would suffer massive unemployment. Military spending has helped us avoid depressions since World War II. We could have accomplished this in other ways, however. According to a study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, money spent for domestic needs -- better housing, mass transit, education and health care -- would actually create far more jobs than the same amount spent for military purposes. But workers who fear losing their jobs if new weapons are not built are not irrational. Neither Congress nor the President is willing to spend the same amounts for domestic needs, and it is this unwillingness which makes the arms race almost a necessity, and creates widespread public resistance to arms reductions.

Profits for powerful corporations. Weapons contracts are extremely profitable for the companies which obtain them. A General Accounting office study of military contracts revealed an average profit rate of 56% on invested capital. Senator Proxmire has with much justice called the B-1 "a public works project for the aerospace industry." In short, the arms race is partly a boondoggle, fueled by the political power of the corporations which profit from it.



Maintaining U.S. power. Our country is deeply committed, for both idealistic and practical reasons, to trying to control political events around the world. The techniques of control include military assistance, arms sales, C.I.A. covert actions, and, if necessary, direct intervention. Nuclear weapons play a role in this spectrum of techniques, even though they have not been used since Nagasaki. They mean we bargain with any non-nuclear nation from a position of vast superiority. They symbolize by their very excessiveness our willingness to go to almost any lengths to maintain our power. After Angola and Indochina, a show of resolve seems very important to many leaders. This is the main reason why the Pentagon has gotten its way so completely in Congress this year.

To sum up. To attain peace we need to seek justice as well. Nuclear weapons are wrong, but they are not entirely irrational. They are techniques the government uses to pursue its foreign policy goals. We can only make basic changes in the techniques if we also change the goals, away from maintaining U.S. power and toward genuine world equality. To do that, and to reduce our domestic reliance on militarism for profits and jobs, we will need social change here at home.



AN ALTERNATIVE VISION: PEACE CONVERSION

The Old Testament covenants and the Gospel offer us the hope of an alternative to sin and death for individuals; to violence and injustice for a society. *Peace Conversion* means a process by which our country can turn toward affirming life and meeting human needs. This requires creating *alternatives to militarism*: other ways of meeting legitimate needs which our country now tries to meet through the arms race. Two such needs are for jobs and for personal freedom and security.

Jobs can be provided by economic conversion -- the process of shifting our resources from military to civilian production. There are enough unmet human needs in our country and the rest of the world to absorb any number of persons released from military production. Economic conversion has taken place in the past, detailed plans exist, and conversion legislation has been introduced in Congress. It is a practical alternative to the arms race, and would provide things we can use instead of bombs.

On the foreign policy side, some of what we defend by military might should not be defended. Efforts to maintain our disproportionate control and consumption of the world's natural resources make it impossible to reduce our reliance on arms. World economic justice is a first step toward being able to have security without arms.

But what about defending our country? If this were the only purpose of our military forces, we could probably reduce our arms by at least three-quarters and be more rather than less secure. But we can also move away from reliance on arms. *Non-violent civilian defense* is an alternative way of defending our freedom. In this kind of defense, a people organizes itself to systematically paralyze the operations of any invading force. This technique, when used in a disciplined way by a united people, has proven effective in many situations. By learning and developing it we can reduce our reliance on arms.

Adopting these alternatives to militarism will only be possible if we change how our institutions work. The main criteria governing decisions by our corporations and political institutions are profit and power. Relinquishing control abroad and economic conversion at home run counter to these criteria. In the last analysis, peace conversion means moving toward a society concerned instead with meeting human needs.

I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. They shall be secure in their own land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslave them. They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them; they shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid.

Ezekiel 34:25-28 (RSV)

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

At no time since ban-the-bomb movements in the 1950's has there been such widespread concern with stopping the arms race. The American Friends Service Committee, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Clergy and Laity Concerned, the Coalition for A New Foreign Policy, and the War Resisters' League are among the organizations working in this field.



You can help begin to stop the arms race and start peace conversion in several ways --

+ Write your Congressional representatives. Urge them to vote against pending weapons systems (the B-1, the Cruise Missile); against arms sales to any party in the Middle East; and for economic conversion legislation.

+ Propose resolutions in your Diocese or other organizations to which you belong, calling on Congress and the President to state that the U.S. will never be the first to use nuclear weapons, and to make unilateral reductions in our nuclear arsenal.

+ If you or a Church body holds stock in a military producing corporation, propose or support resolutions for its proxy statement, calling on management to make plans for reducing weapons contracts and converting to civilian production.

+ Arrange for an event or study group in your parish, on the Biblical implications of the arms race and peace conversion. (We can help with materials and planning, or put you in touch with people in your area who are working on these issues.)

WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU. PLEASE WRITE IF YOU'D LIKE FURTHER INFORMATION OR ANY KIND OF ASSISTANCE.

