

Basel 19th IPPNW Congress
Bernard Lown, MD
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It is a joy to revisit with colleagues whom I admire for principled steadfastness in the long struggle against the perverse culture of nuclearism. With advancing age I have grown to regard perseverance more worthy than enthusiasm, especially when it extends over decades and when the outlook for progress and change appears distant.

No one has practiced these qualities more masterfully than Eugene Chazov. He played a vital role in launching IPPNW and was key for its startling success. Chazov provided the magic star-dust that propelled the doctor's movement unto the world stage. I greet many other friends, no one with greater affection than the Gottsteins, Ulli and Monika, who were instrumental in founding the ever vibrant German IPPNW affiliate and provided it with towering moral leadership. A like role was pursued by the Taipales, Vappu and Ilkka in Finland whose wide ranging humanitarian and peace activities made an enduring impact. I have never stopped marveling at the musical impresario genius of the Haubers, Peter and Ingrid, who last year celebrated in Berlin the 25th anniversary of IPPNW Concert. Martin Vosseler makes Switzerland proud not only for a lifelong commitment to antinuclearism but for rousing environmental consciousness and teaching that the life giving sun can also protect us from the impact of our energy gluttony. A salute also to Andre Nidecker and his colleagues who made this splendid Basel Congress possible.

Twenty years ago many of us were certain that genocidal weapons would be rapidly phased out following the collapse of the Soviet Union, out. After all the only rationale of nuclear arsenals was to deter dangerous nuclear armed adversaries. We were convinced that since the Communist empire had been consigned to the dustbin of history, nuclear abolition was in the cards. We were categorically wrong. Our misjudgment was due to a wrong analysis of the geopolitics of our era. I learned this while writing the recently published memoir of the IPPNW entitled "Prescription for Survival: A Doctor's Journey to End Nuclear Madness." Two factors stand out as paramount for the durability of nuclearism: American military hegemony and the North South divide. Let me just touch on these momentous issues.

American Militarism

It is a hard to account why the US government has been committed to nuclear weapons? America being the strongest nation on earth by every conceivable metric, whether military, economic, or scientific, a nuclear world diminishes rather than bolsters its homeland security.

Nuclear bombs are potential equalizers, enabling the weak to inflict unacceptable damage on the strong. Few societies are more susceptible to their malevolent consequences than the rich urbanized, highly developed industrialized North, foremost the United States. In August 2003 three tree branches tangled with power lines in Ohio; nine seconds later, 80 gigawatts of electric power –equivalent to electricity produced by 80 nuclear power plants- was offline across Northern USA, leaving millions of people in the dark and paralyzing society to an abrupt standstill.

The US today is a military colossus unmatched in world history. An appreciation of the seminal role of the military in American life is reflected by the military budget. In fact the Pentagon budget equals the military expenditures of the entire world combined. It is also the leading merchant of military weapons to the developing world. The US now provides 52% of world's arms sales more than twice as much as second place Russia.

There have been few attempts to explain why the threat of a relative handful of terrorists should evoke a military buildup exceeding that of the Reagan administration during the height of the Cold War. At the time thousands of Soviet missiles were targeted at the USA threatening its extinction.

The gargantuan military budget has been supported with equal fervor whether republicans or democrats occupied the White House. As matter of fact, President Obama has raised military spending far more than Bush. At present the defense budget is larger in inflation-adjusted dollars than at any point since the end of World War II. For the American people this is a scourge of tragic magnitude. The Pentagon absorbs as much money as the US federal government spends on education, public health, housing, employment, pensions, food aid and welfare put together. In 2008, more than 49 million people (including 16.7 million children) in the United States lived in a house-hold at risk of going hungry.

Under conditions of mounting social crisis at home, and with no substantial military antagonist abroad, congressional Democrats, the intellectual classes and the American media all support this vast “military-police” buildup justified by the imperatives of the “war on terrorism.”

Another aspect of the military machine deserves attention, namely the fact that American military power peppers the globe. In a prior age, the expansion of empire could be counted by the number of lands colonized. America's version of the colony is the military base. These have grown so numerous that even the military is uncertain of their exact number. The Pentagon currently owns or rents about 700 overseas bases in 130 countries in every continent and has another 6,000 bases in the United States and its territories. To dominate the oceans and seas of the world, the Pentagon has created thirteen naval task forces built around aircraft carriers. A single such task force can challenge any existing sea power.

New generation of weapons now coming of the drawing boards enable America to strike anywhere from its own territory with US-based missiles having global reach, not to mention predator drones, these robotic killing machines that have claimed far more civilian lives than terrorists.

Nearly 40 years ago Martin Luther King bemoaned, “My own country I lament is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.”

It may seem I have digressed from IPPNW dominant motif of nuclear abolition. On the contrary I am increasingly persuaded that nuclear zero will be impossible without a greater symmetry of global military power. In fact there is no way China, India, Pakistan or any other developing or present nuclear power would be willing to abandon nuclear deterrent capabilities in the face of the awesome unmatched American military might. Furthermore the pressure of nuclear proliferation is likely to mount.

The above analysis presents only one aspect of the nuclear conundrum. The other and in my mind far more critical issue relates to the North-South divide.

Developing World

The present world order is a continuing legacy of Christopher Columbus. We are now in the 518th year of the Columbus era. An era marked by shame when great wealth was plundered, when indigenous cultures were uprooted, when native populations were subjected to genocide. The human chattel and

undreamed riches of the new world provided the muscle and sinew for the industrial revolution. Euro-American affluence rests in no small measure on the extraction of prodigious resources from the Third World.

Yet it is a grim fact that the transfer of wealth from poor to rich continues. Claims of luxury are pitted against claims of subsistence.

The North-South divide is mammoth and growing. According to the UN Human Development Report in 1960 the income gap between the richest and the poorest was 30-1, by 1999 it more than doubled to 74-1. The just released Oxford Multidimensional Index of Poverty finds that 1659 million in developing countries live in acute poverty of whom 840 million are continuously hungry. Health care is an unobtainable luxury. Malawi, for example, has 260 doctors to care for a population of 13 million. One doctor per 50,000 people. About 50% of global nonagricultural labor force is either unemployed or under-employed. One in every 6 children in the world of primary school age are not in school.

Multilateral trade laws and international financial agreements keep the poor anchored to their poverty. These arrangements institutionalize inequity far more powerfully than colonizing armies. It is the reason why three million Mexican farmers have been forced off the land where they have been growing corn for 10,000 years. The US is now flooding Mexico with cheap corn sold below the cost of production in Mexico. This free market miracle is due to the American government subsidizing its corn farmers to the tune of \$10 billion annually. The result is a northward migration of Mexicans to the US seeking work which has resulted in a dangerous reactionary political backlash against migrants.

Such displacements of populations is a global phenomenon. Imposition of structural adjustment policies by the IMF, World Bank and other lending institutions on economically weak countries, compels them to open borders to the inflow of cheap agricultural imports forcing peasants of the land into urban slums. Bursting shantytowns, not fit for animals, account for galloping urbanization.

The divide between North-South is maintained, nurtured and made cancerous also by the arms trade. This has become a substantial source of developing world debt which limits rich poor countries investing in education, in health care, in clean water, in sanitation and in critical infrastructures. Tanzania, for example, spends 4 times more on debt

repayment than on education and 9 times more than on health. Debt repayment has devastated social services across the board. Adding to the abysmal misery and deprivation is the AIDS epidemic which is bringing devastation comparable to the Black death that depopulated Europe in the middle ages. Today life expectancy for women in Zimbabwe is 42, in Afghanistan 44. By contrast in Japan it is 86. There is no sound biologic reason why there should be a 44 year difference in life expectancy across the world. According to Dr. Michael Marmot President of the British Medical Association this 44 year difference arises because of a social and economic arrangements.

Nineteen years ago, at the 11th IPPNW Congress in Mexico city, I called attention to the inevitability of our entering an age of terrorism. In a transparent world awash with wealth and luxury broadcast 24/7, joblessness and hopelessness promote rage and desperation in the young who become ready fodder for fanaticisms of all ilks. It seemed to me inevitable that mounting inequalities will give birth to terrorism for which the militarization of democratic societies will only enhance blowback and global destabilization.

Exactly ten years later, on September 11, 2001, we Americans lost our innocence. Two mighty oceans no longer afforded secure unbreachable moats. The most powerful military ever assembled, armed with a panoply of exotic weapons that can project devastating destruction anywhere proved ineffective against determined suicidal terrorists with paper cutters. Since WWII US spent more than 25 trillion dollars for the military yet without being able to defend its own people.

The bottom line, I believe to achieve nuclear abolition requires the USA to take a lead in general disarmament, and a global shift of the massive resources of more than 1.25 trillion annually to breach the chasm of inequality, Such humanitarian priorities are essential if we are to address the onrushing climate crisis, the urban rot emerging in much of the developing world, and the epidemic of CVD now sweeping developing countries. Is this possible?

Basis for Optimism

While the analysis is bleak, seldom has there been more reason for optimism. This is not a romantic whistling in the dark. The optimism derives from a number of deep global transformations. Now waiting in

the wings are enormous social forces claiming equity, demanding new social priorities and agitating for peace.

One basis for my optimism is the ongoing information revolution, a social transformation of true epic proportions. In public imagination the information age is embodied in the Internet. Indeed nothing in prior human history has made readily available more information, for more people, at lower cost. The Internet showed its potential in 2003, just before the Iraq war, when it mobilized the largest global protest demonstrations against war ever. Twelve million people took to the streets on every continent, in over 700 cities, in 60 countries. The impressive outpouring of anti-war sentiment led the New York Times to editorialize that there were now two superpowers: the USA and global public opinion. The mobilizing power of people against the concentration of corporate and elite power is just in its infancy. (Remind Satellife)

A second factor weighing in the equation for optimism is the rising global level of literacy and education. People living on the edge of subsistence are charged with expectations of a life other than backbreaking toil and premature death. Means of mass communication such as the cell phone, Face book, Twiter, the blogosphere, television constantly project visions of a world able to provide luxurious abundance for some. It compels people to imagine the possible. When the voiceless multitudes begin to whisper, the resulting shout becomes unquenchable and transforming.

Perhaps the most important and least obvious factor for optimism is the transformative perception of shared interests across national borders. During the entire Columbus era ordinary working people living in the industrialized world were indirect benefactors from imperialism and colonialism. Now with a world market without boundaries manufacturing is outsourced to countries with the lowest wages who are indifferent to environmental mayhem. It matters little how strongly unionized workers are in industrialized countries, their militancy is defeated by moving an entire industry to another hemisphere. The plummeting standard of living of the working and middle classes teaches global solidarity. The economic destinies of working people the world over have now grown inseparable and will lead to increased cooperation.

My greatest source of optimism though derives from experience with IPPNW. During the past few years writing "Prescription for survival: A Doctor's Journey to End Nuclear Madness," has invigorated a sense of the possible.

One needs to recall that the 1980's were the most perilous time in history. Human kind was poised on the edge of a precipice and there seemed no way back. The nuclear arms race was then galloping without moral brakes, like cancer cells multiplying because they have been genetically programmed to do so.

Recall that in January 1981 there was a bare handful of physician activists meeting in my living room. Less than five year later Chazov and I were receiving the ultimate accolade, the Nobel Peace Prize, on behalf of you. In this brief interlude we identified a large medical community of kindred spirits, unstinting in social dedication. We organized 150 thousand physicians in 60 countries to join our cause. We exposed to millions of people the litany of horrors resulting from blast, fire, and radiation. We persuaded a cowed and accepting public that medicine had nothing to offer in case of nuclear war. We helped expose some of the insane illusions being promoted by the military establishments; such as limited nuclear war, clean bombs, the efficacy of underground shelters and civil defense, of surviving a nuclear exchange, on and on.

We urged a strategy of unilateral deeds to begin with cessation of nuclear testing rather than the blather of endless secret negotiations. Single mindedly we pursued a global cease fire campaign that involved all our affiliates. Gorbachev listened to the physician proposals and stopped the malign traverse. He saw wisdom in our campaign and embraced it. Our novel brand of people's diplomacy contributed to dismantling the cold war.

In this new age, IPPNW continues to have a vital role. In my mind IPPNW has to find health links in addressing three key issues: first and foremost the growing North South divide. It is not possible for affluent nations to purchase security when wretched and hungry multitudes are clamoring outside the gates of the big house. Terrorism is not to be defeated by projecting military mayhem largely against civilians.

Second, American militarism is now a major obstacle to fostering world peace.

Third we need to be uncompromising in our historic mission to achieve a nuclear free world. Each one of these issues undermines health, threatens life, deprives scarce resources from improving human well being and degrading our fragile environment by accelerating global warming. We need to counterpoint the trade offs between death dealing and life saving investments.

Conclusion

Brooding over the nuclear threat for over a half century now, I am led inexorably to the conviction that only unprecedented arousal of moral revulsion will provide the necessary social energies to prioritize a global order fit for human beings.

Human history is yet to begin. Required is an abandonment of the instruments of violence to adjudicate differences between peoples and nations. Doctors in their innermost being know of the fragility, brevity and the miracle of life. We physicians have a vital historical role today. We better not shut our eyes and remain passive, for hope without action is hopeless. Posterity has no lobby with politicians; each of us must speak for generations yet unborn. We shall succeed as we empower millions of people with our vision of the better world that is possible.