The Ethics and Morals of Nuclear Warfare

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“With the monstrous weapon man already has, humanity is in danger of being trapped in this world by its moral adolescents...

We have many men of science, but too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness...”

- Omar Bradley, 1948
  Gen. of the Army, Fmr Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
“Today I can declare my hope and declare it from the bottom of my heart that we will eventually see the time when that number of nuclear weapons is down to zero and the world is a much better place.”

- Colin Powell, 1993
Ret. 4-Star Gen,
Fmr Sec. of State
“...the end of the Cold War has made it possible to consider seriously proposals to ban nuclear weapons altogether.”

• With the end of the Cold War, our nation faces strong questions of the morality of maintaining a nuclear arsenal

• Efforts for non-proliferation and disarmament are increasingly playing important roles in international affairs and politics

• Consideration must be given for the moral and ethical implications of nuclear weapons use and research

• Today, questions of ethical conflict and moral obligation raise doubt about the appropriateness of nuclear weapons proper

“Nuclear Weapons and the Human Future”
http://www.wagingpeace.org/nuc_weapons_human_future.php
What do we mean by *Ethical Conflict*?

- **Ethics:** “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation”
- **Conflict:** “mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands”
  
  (Merriam-Webster)

- What does this imply?
  - Ethical Conflict can arise when goals and obligations work counter to what is good
  - Conflict arises when determining the acceptability of building, testing, and using nuclear weapons
How do morals come into play?

• Morality calls individuals to work to ideals of right human conduct
  – What does this mean?
  – How is “right human conduct” determined?

“I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.”
  – Ernest Hemmingway
Professional Ethics

Many professional societies have established a code of ethics to guide the work of those in the profession.

AMSE – “Engineers uphold and advance the integrity, honor, and dignity of the Engineering profession by... using their knowledge and skill for the enhancement of human welfare...”

AIAA – “The AIAA member... will use his knowledge and skill for the advancement of human welfare...”

ACS – “Chemical professionals have a responsibility to serve the public interest and safety and... be concerned with the health and safety of co-workers, consumers and the community...”

(Almost) all professions include clause to work for the betterment of society and human welfare!
Potential Conflicts?

• Nuclear weapons often have high civilian death rates
• Practical military targets are hard to come by
• Radiation from a single explosion poses health risks to communities worldwide

Raises the question:
How can a scientist or engineer justify creating and improving nuclear weapons technology?
Point: Samuel C. Florman, Civil Engineer and noted Author

“Engineers are obliged to bring integrity and competence to whatever work they undertake. But they should not be counted on to consider paramount the welfare of the human race...

As a class, engineers have neither the power nor the right to plan social change... Should professionals work only on projects that they as citizens approve?

Conventional wisdom suggests that it is the duty of enlightened professionals to lead. But, paradoxically, it is essential that professionals should serve...

It follows that engineers (within the limits of conscience) will sometimes labor on behalf of causes in which they do not believe.

Such a tolerant view also makes it easier for engineers to make a living.”

-Engineers, Ethics, and Nuclear Weapons
Counterpoint: American Civil Engineering Society

“Engineers are the agents of technology. Engineers should be among the first to espouse that technology is here to serve. It is possible to use it when it helps and reject it when it hinders. Technology has no intrinsic value...” - Roger Evans & Thomas Munsey

Call to reject technology that works against the common good!
The idea of Nuclear Weapons as a deterrent to war

- Following WWII, various treaties have established a current nuclear weapons climate in which only a handful of countries are allowed the right to possess nuclear weapons.
- Nuclear Weapons proponents claim that possession of such weapons promotes peace by discouraging countries from entering nuclear war.

Map of nuclear weapons states:
- NPT Nuclear Weapon States (China, France, Russia, UK, US)
- Non-NPT Nuclear Weapon States (India, North Korea, Pakistan)
- Undeclared Nuclear Weapon States (Israel)
- States suspected of having nuclear weapon programs (Iran, Syria)
- NATO weapons sharing recipients
- States formerly possessing nuclear weapons
• The destructiveness of nuclear weapons is immense. Any use would be catastrophic.
• Nuclear weapons are held by a handful of states which insist that these weapons provide unique security benefits, and yet reserve uniquely to themselves the right to own them.
• The world faces threats of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism... a central reality is that nuclear weapons diminish the security of all states.
• The Commission calls upon the Big 5 to give the lead by committing themselves, unequivocally, to the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

• A nuclear weapon free world can be secured and maintained through political commitment, and anchored in an enduring and binding legal framework.
What does this mean?

– Nuclear weapons do not deter war, but rather encourage weapons buildup

– The monopoly of nuclear weapons by the largest countries isolates others and threatens international cooperation

– A nuclear weapon free world could maintain world peace
“What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries? Along with countless persons of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims...”

- Pope Benedict XVI, 01/01/06
United Nations: Aiming For Disarmament since 1946

Basic Belief: Very Existence Is Unethically Dangerous

• “Dangers arise from their Very Existence”

• Dangers to:
  – long lasting effects on natural environment
  – potential to kill millions
  – destroy entire cities

• UN has supported disarmament since its founding in 1946 through various treaties
First Resolution
UN General Assembly, 1946:

• General Principle - Science for Peaceful Purposes
• Plans to make proposals for:

  (a) extending between all nations exchange of basic scientific information for peaceful ends

  (b) “control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes”

  (c) “elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction”

  (d) “for effective safeguards by way of inspection and other means to protect complying States against the hazards of violation and evasions.”
Two Basic Types of Treaties

- Multilateral Treaties to prevent nuclear proliferation and testing, and promote nuclear disarmament

- Bilateral and Pluralateral treaties to reduce certain categories of nuclear weapons, and to prevent proliferation of these weapons and to inhibit their delivery vehicles.

UN General Assembly 1946
Treaties to prevent nuclear proliferation and testing, and promote nuclear disarmament

- **Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT):**
  - Went into effect I 1970, updated version still exists today.
  - Goal is to “prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to further the goal of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament, and to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.”

- **Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT):**
  - Into effect 1963, still in effect today
  - limit environmental impacts
  - prohibits all tests that, “radioactive debris to be present outside the territorial limits of the State under whose jurisdiction or control”
  - prohibits nuclear weapons tests in atmosphere, outer space, and underwater

- **Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT):**
  - opened for signing 1996
  - still needs India, Pakistan and North Korea to sign for ratification
  - aims to prohibit all nuclear weapon explosion test
Bilateral and Plurilateral treaties to reduce certain categories of nuclear weapons, and to prevent proliferation of these weapons and to inhibit their delivery vehicles.

**Wassenaar Arrangement**
- From 1996
- Aimed to promote responsibility in regards to nuclear arms transfer in order to prevent acquisition of armaments for inappropriate military uses

**Missile Technology Control regime**
- into effect 2002 technology
- guidelines controlling export of missiles and which can transport these missiles
Recent Treaties

• September 2009 Nuclear Weapons Resolution
• States with nuclear weapons:
  - to continue disarming to ratify a ban on testing them
  - stop production fissile material agree a treaty stopping the production of fissile materials.
• non weapons states:
  - stronger safeguards to stop the spread of nuclear weapons.
Roman Catholic Church: Just War Theory Rules

• Nuclear Warfare must be in coherence with Just war theory

• Just war Theory, war only to:
  1. promote peace
  2. help innocent victims

• “In the eyes of the Catholic Church, nuclear weapons are evil and immoral and must be eliminated as a precondition to obtaining peace.”
INITIAL VIEWS:

• Pope Pius XII 1951-“Is it not perhaps a kind of practical materialism and superficial sentimentality to make the existence and threat of these weapons the sole and principal consideration in the question of peace?”

• Pope John XXIII 1963-”production of [nuclear] arms is allegedly justified on the grounds that in present day conditions peace cannot be preserved without an equal balance of armaments”
Pope John Paul II

• 1965- “Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation." *Vatican II, Church in the Modern World (1965) 80.*

• 1983- “Keeping the peace in the nuclear age is a moral and political imperative”- US Catholic Pastoral Letter

• Today-“Holy See has withdrawn the limited acceptance it gave to nuclear weapons during the Cold War”-Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace, Proposed Third Draft
1965

- Acceptable for limited use to protect innocent
- World War II uses debated on grounds of just war
- WWII considered just but was the use of nuclear weapons, given their ramifications necessary?
1983

- “Deterrence is acceptable only as a transitional condition leading to progressive nuclear disarmament”
- No need to further build weapons
- No need to continue the scientific research behind nuclear weaponry
Conflict Within Church

- 1986 Committee of six bishops met to assess success of 1983 pastoral
- Difficult Situation:
  - Side 1: Since 1983 conditions of deterrence not met
  - Side 2: Bishops can’t break ties with church
Today

• Similar Views to 1983
• We must make a concerted effort to rid the world of nuclear weapons
• Silence is unacceptable

Locations of Nuclear Weapons Today
Debate

• In 1965 the UN solely supported disarmament as ethical
• In 1965 the Vatican supported disarmament but believed just war theory and nuclear weapons could in certain circumstances coincide.

Do you think nuclear weapons and warfare, given the extreme damage, can fit with just war theory?
Other religions

Statements made at December 7 2009 Parliament of the World’s Religions

Muslim: “Abrahim Ramey, director of human and civil rights of the Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation, commented: "All religions share a common wish for peace and reject nuclear weapons. Morally, nuclear weapons do not have any role or reason to exist in our world.”"

Jewish: “Inspired by the prophets, we raise our voices to call upon the United States government and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to adopt a mutual freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and new delivery systems for nuclear weapons.” Central Conference of Rabbis

Jain: “Jain faith is totally opposed to all weapons of mass destruction and wholeheartedly supports all efforts and campaigns for nuclear disarmament.”
General Ethical/Moral Standards for Nuclear Weapons Throughout History

• Post-WWI Mentality
• Early WWII
• Late WWII/Manhattan Project Era
• Post-WWII
• Today
Post-WWI Mentality

- American public haunted by images of WWI
- Millions of slow, painful deaths of soldiers
  - Use of machine guns to keep soldiers in the trenches
  - Chemical weapons -- lethal gases
- Trench warfare not an option again
“A scientist belongs to his country in times of war and to all mankind in times of peace”

- Fritz Haber, creator of chlorine gas
Early WWII

• Another drawn-out war not an option
• Public feared that invasion of Japan would lead to conditions similar to WWI
  – Disastrous for the Allies – could only lead to slow, painful deaths of many soldiers
• Americans saw Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941) as a motive for revenge
• 1939 – Einstein writes to President Roosevelt to warn about nuclear weapons
Late WWII/Manhattan Project

• The Manhattan Project – 1942-1945
  – US program for development of atomic bomb
  – Goal: learn about and utilize technical possibilities

• Bombs dropped August 1945
  – Hiroshima
  – Nagasaki
“It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful.”

-President Truman’s diary, 1945
Immediately After -- Criticism

- Two days after the first attack, former President Hoover said that "[t]he use of the atomic bomb, with its indiscriminate killing of women and children, revolts my soul."
- A Chicago Tribune editorial stated that Truman was guilty of "crimes against humanity" for "the utterly unnecessary killing of uncounted Japanese."
- Similar sentiments felt by much of the American public – but isn’t this what they wanted?
Immediately After -- Criticism

- Realization that Japan would likely have surrendered soon
- Criticism continues throughout the 1950s
Post-WWII

• Despite criticism of the bombings, public uneasy about NOT having nuclear weapons
• Idea that other countries could have nukes makes the public nervous
  – Especially Communist countries, e.g. Russia
• Cold War begins
The Pugwash Conferences

• 1957 meeting attended by 22 influential scientists
• Why?
  – Manifesto released in 1955 by Russell and Einstein
  – Called on scientists to meet in order to discuss threat of nuclear weapons
• Pugwash went on to play significant role in later nuclear legislation
  – Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963
  – Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968
  – Etc.
“Here then is the problem which we present to you. Stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?”

- Russell-Einstein Manifesto
The Pugwash Conferences

• October 1995 – Pugwash and Professor Joseph Rotblat receive Nobel Peace Prize

“For their efforts to diminish the part played by nuclear arms in international politics and in the longer run to eliminate such arms.”

— The Norwegian Nobel Institute
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

- February 1958 – CND launched in London
- All kinds of people involved – journalists, religious groups, scientists, academics, etc.
  – Motivation: European fear of major nuclear conflict
Aldermaston Marches

• AKA the “Easter Marches”
• Protest demonstrations organized by the CND
  – Raised awareness, attracted attention to the cause
• Every Easter Sunday 1958-1963
  – Several thousand people
  – Between London and Aldermaston
Aldermaston March
Strategies to Oppose Nukes during the Cold War

• The Horror Strategy
  – Horror of situations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings used to illustrate the immoral implications of nuclear weapons
  – WEAKNESS: Should necessity trump morality in a dire situation?
Strategies to Oppose Nukes during the Cold War

• The Risk Strategy
  – If nukes continued to be used, the world could succumb to an all-out nuclear war – humans could be wiped out?
  – WEAKNESS: A favorite argument during the Cold War, but after that period ended, risks became much lower and argument generally seen as null
Today

• Idea that it is impossible for both nuclear weapons and human security to exist gradually becoming more popular
  – Less “ivory tower mentality” – idea that scientific findings and their applications completely separate

• HOWEVER – post-September 11, more people worrying about terrorist groups gaining control of nuclear weapons
  – Should non-rogue nations be stockpiling nukes just in case?
Discussion Questions

• Should scientists be held responsible for the ethical implications of their contributions to weapons technology? Why or why not?

• How can the “most terrible thing ever discovered” be justified to also be seen as the “most useful?”

• What do you think – in times of war, should necessity trump morality? Why or why not?

• How do you think that citizen participation (such as in the Aldermaston Marches) can affect politics?

• What do you think the risk is of terrorist groups gaining control of nuclear weapons? How should nations combat this fear?
Sources

- Class notes