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# Ike was Right

Ann Abdo

*none*, arabdoo@earthlink.net

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## Ike Was Right

“Just nuke ‘em and be done with it,” she said. There was instant silence. A small group of people were standing together talking about Afghanistan. Someone changed the subject, and my mind wandered to a picture I saw a few years ago in an August 1995 *National Geographic* magazine showing the devastation of “nuking” Hiroshima. I remembered what I learned in school and what my father told me: Germany had surrendered. Dropping the nuclear bombs ended the war very quickly in the Pacific avoiding an invasion of Japan, saving the lives of thousands of American servicemen.

I don’t remember ever seeing a picture of the destruction or reading about the devastation until I saw the *National Geographic* article. Above the arched panoramic view is the statement, “It would not be an exaggeration to say that half a century after the bomb, Hiroshima is not one city but two: one that can never forget and the other that can never know.” Under the photographic arch it explains that photographer Shigeo Hayashi, two months after the bombing stood on top of the remains of a roof more than a half mile from ground zero, and took the pictures. “Other than a scattering of ruined concrete hulks there was nothing,” he said. August 6, 1945, the day after the bombing, “four square miles around the hypo-center were flattened and charred, 70,000 buildings were destroyed. Some 80,000 people died in the wasteland. By the end of year 60,000 more succumbed to burns, wounds, and radiation sickness.” On August 9<sup>th</sup> a second atomic bomb destroyed Nagasaki and Japan surrendered six days later.

It was the end of World War II, but it was the beginning of the Arms Race and the Cold War. Very few questioned our government’s actions. We had won what became known as the “good war.” But is war ever really good? U.S. Military wounded and dead totaled 1,077,245. Eastern Europe came under the total domination of the Soviet Union for over forty years. Korea became a divided country; there were over one million refugees; all military and civilian deaths totaled 57,615,400. (This number equals the total populations of Kansas, Canada, and Australia.)

President Dwight (Ike) D. Eisenhower who was General of the Allied armies in Europe during World War II gave a farewell presidential address to the nation on Jan. 17, 1961. He talked about our country’s leadership, prestige, and military power and how important it is to use our power to further “world peace and human betterment.” He warned that we “must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be instead,” a country that sets the example in working with other countries to create “a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect.” For the first time in American history, the United States had a permanent military and a huge “armaments industry.” He warned us: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence ..... by the military-industrial complex.” He urged the people to be vigilant, “so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Did we take President Eisenhower’s advice? Did we see the political influence of the military-industrial complex? Unfortunately, there was too much money at stake. Government contracts for research and military equipment provided jobs and wealth. There was also the real fear of world domination by the Soviet Union. The nuclear arms race had started and the United States felt the need to make itself ready for a future nuclear assault.

President John F. Kennedy took office on January 20, 1961. In September of that year, he gave a presentation at the United Nations. He talked about finding alternatives to war. He warned, “...a nuclear disaster, spread by wind and water and fear, could well engulf the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the committed and the uncommitted alike. Mankind must put an end to war—or war will put an end to mankind.” He then went on to talk about how the United Nations could play a key role in bringing about world peace. He challenged the Soviet Union, “not to an arms race, but to a peace race – to advance together step by step, stage by stage, until general and complete disarmament has been achieved.”

In 1961 the following nations had nuclear weapons: United States (1945), Soviet Union (1949), Great Britain (1952), France (1960). Kennedy asked for an immediate signing of a test ban treaty; stopping the manufacture of fissionable materials for use in weapons; preventing their transfer to any nation lacking them at that time; prohibiting the sale of nuclear weapons to countries that did not own

them; keeping outer space from becoming a nuclear battlefield; destroying existing nuclear weapons; halting testing and production of delivery systems and eventually destroying them.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev realized how close they had come to nuclear annihilation, so they started an exchange of private letters on banning nuclear weapons testing. Then on June 10, 1963 at a commencement address at American University, President Kennedy stated it was time to end the cold war. "If we cannot end our differences, at least we can help make the world a safe place for diversity," he said. Throughout the summer negotiations were held. Moscow signed The Limited Nuclear Test Ban treaty on August 5, 1963, the Senate approved it in late September and the President signed it on October 7, 1963.

Forty-seven days later President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. Since then more countries acquired nuclear weapons: China (1964), Israel (1967), India (1974), Pakistan (1990), North Korea (2006), Iran (20??) Forty additional countries are capable of building a bomb. Nuclear weapons today are seventy times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The United States and Russia have 96% of the worlds' nuclear arsenal. Total nuclear weapons world wide are estimated at 23,355. Bishop Thomas Gumbleton expressed it so eloquently when he said, "it is estimated that planet earth is at least 4½ billion years old and we have the power to destroy God's creation in an afternoon."

In 1984 President Ronald Reagan in his State of the Union Address gave his opinion on nuclear weapons: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?" In 1986, he met with Russian Secretary General Gorbachev and found they both felt the world should be free of these most destructive armaments, but they were unable to come to an agreement.

Since 1963 there have been eleven international treaties to limit and then ban testing and to reduce the number of nuclear weapons. The United States is still testing and maintaining its nuclear arsenal. The New START Treaty was signed and ratified by the United States and Russia in December 2010; it caps the number of deployed strategic warheads to 1,550 for each country. This is a reduction from the previous treaty of between 1,700 and 2,200 warheads. At the same time this treaty was working its way through the Senate, President Obama promised to spend \$80 billion over ten years to maintain and modernize the nation's nuclear arsenal.

With all the hype and fanfare in the media, I actually thought that the President had achieved something significant toward making a safer and more peaceful world. Then I read about the nuclear arsenal upgrade, and the fact that the treaty does not address the issue of nuclear proliferation. What a sham. Where is Superman when we need him? Please bear with me. I know this is a serious topic. In *The Quest for Peace: Superman IV* (1987), there is Lex Luther, Superman's nemesis who is a nuclear war profiteer. "Make the world safe for war profits," he says. "The more fear you make, the more loot you take." Superman decides to take action and makes an announcement to a United Nations looking assemblage, that he is going to rid the planet of all nuclear weapons; war is folly and we can no longer live in fear. He goes around the world collecting the nuclear weapons by putting them in a giant mesh bag. He then flies into outer space and with all his strength throws the weapons into the sun. There is a huge explosion and the weapons are all destroyed.

It would be great if there were super heroes and quick fixes to international conflicts, but "nuking" Afghanistan would create a far worse situation than we have now: we would set the stage for a nuclear holocaust, and Superman is science fiction; but Lex Luther speaks more truth than fiction. We live in a society that glorifies war and violence; we have a larger military than all other countries combined, with a nuclear arsenal we can never use. We are told that this is the only way for our country to be free from harm. With all of our might, it did not prevent the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal office building, killing 168 people, nor did it prevent the destruction of the World Trade Center and a plane flying into the Pentagon killing 3,000 people. We then invaded a country that was no threat to us, and we have been enmeshed in a Civil War in Afghanistan since October 2001.

So what is this really all about? I propose it is about power, image, and money. Many people in this country expect our President to exude power and not be afraid to order our military to engage in conflict. It is about defense contractors who take in billions of dollars every year. It is about Congress, who has abdicated its constitutional responsibility in declaring war. It is about our elected officials' refusal to cut weapons budgets because weapons manufacturers provide many jobs in their states. It is about campaign contributions, and the military establishment wanting to maintain the status quo.

I suggest that we go back to President Eisenhower's farewell address and heed his message: "Disarmament, with mutual honor and confidence, is a continuing imperative. Together we must learn how to compose difference, not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose.....As one who has witnessed the horror and the lingering sadness of war – as one who knows that another war could utterly destroy this civilization which has been so slowly and painfully built over thousands of years.....You and I – my fellow citizens-need to be strong in our faith that all nations, under God, will reach the goal of peace and justice...."

".....We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love."

Ann Abdoo, Member, Citizens for Peace

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