OMNI

NUCLEAR WEAPONS ABOLITION NEWSLETTER #20, July 20, 2014.

OMNI Building a Culture of PEACE, Justice, and Ecology.

Compiled by Dick Bennett.

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OMNI HIROSHIMA/NAGASAKI REMEMBRANCE, AUGUST 10, 2014, TOWN CENTER AT PEACE PLANET

Contents of Nuclear Weapons Abolition Newsletter #20, July 20, 2014

Presidents Obama and Medvedev Commitment 2009
Plan to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
Statement by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
Global Zero Movement
Two Reviews of Elaine Scarry’s *Nuclear Monarchy*

PRESIDENT OBAMA URGES NUCLEAR ABOLITION

On April 1, 2009, Presidents Obama and Russia’s Medvedev jointly “…committed [their] two countries to achieving a nuclear free world.” Three days later in Prague, Pres. Obama in a speech reinforced his commitment to leading an international effort to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Now Global Zero is developing a step-by-step Action Plan for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons….

PLAN TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS, POST-OBAMA/MEDVEDEV 2009 COMMITMENT

http://www.globalzero.org/get-the-facts/GZAP

THE GLOBAL ZERO ACTION PLAN

The Global Zero Action Plan calls for the United States and Russia – who hold more than 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons – to negotiate deep cuts in their arsenals, followed by international negotiations to eliminate all nuclear weapons by 2030.

Support for this goal is widespread among experienced and respected leaders, throughout the world and across the political spectrum, including the hundreds of political, military, diplomatic and national security leaders worldwide who are part of the Global Zero movement. The Action Plan builds on the vision of President Reagan whose goal was “the total elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth” and who – along with President Gorbachev – began the process of nuclear arms reductions 25 years ago.
This will not happen overnight. It will take years of work. We are doing it and we will get there.

PHASE I

After ratifying the New START Treaty, the United States and Russia agree to reduce to 1,000 total warheads each by 2018. Upon ratification of the U.S.-Russian bilateral accord, all other nuclear weapons countries cap the total number of warheads in their arsenals and commit to participate in multilateral negotiations for proportionate reductions of stockpiles. Preparation for multilateral negotiations begin.

PHASE II

Through a multilateral framework, the United States and Russia reduce their nuclear arsenals to 500 total warheads each by 2021 – as other nuclear weapons countries maintain a cap on their stockpiles until 2018 and commit to a proportionate reductions until 2021. A rigorous and comprehensive verification and enforcement system is implemented, including no-notice, on-site inspections, and strengthened safeguards on the civilian nuclear fuel cycle to prevent diversion of materials to build weapons.

PHASE III

The world’s nuclear-capable countries negotiate and sign a Global Zero Accord: a legally binding international agreement for the phased, verified, proportionate reduction of all nuclear arsenals to zero total warheads by 2030.

PHASE IV

The phased, verified, proportionate dismantlement of all nuclear arsenals to zero total warheads is complete by 2030. The comprehensive verification and enforcement system prohibiting the development and possession of nuclear weapons is in place to ensure that the world is never again threatened by nuclear weapons.

get the action plan

http://www.globalzero.org/get-the-facts/GZAP

GET THE FACTS
The Road to Zero
Global Zero Action Plan
U.S. Nuclear Strategy
NATO-Russian Tactical Nukes
$1 Trillion Per Decade
FAQs

STAY CONNECTED http://www.globalzero.org/get-the-facts/GZAP

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Global Zero is the international movement for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Global Zero Home

TAKE ACTION

Will you join the movement and help us eliminate the nuclear threat once and for all? Add your name now.

Watch and share our new video with Michael Douglas, Matt Damon, Morgan Freeman, Robert De Niro, Naomi Watts and a host of amazing artists!

Start a Global Zero chapter on your college or high school campus today!

LEARN MORE

Frequently Asked Questions about the nuclear threat and the Global Zero solution.

The Global Zero Action Plan for the elimination of all nuclear weapons.


GZ IN THE NEWS

Scientists Developing Novel Technique That Could Facilitate Nuclear Disarmament
MUST ELIMINATE ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE THEIR GRAVE RISK,

SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS IN MESSAGE TO MEMORIAL CEREMONY IN NAGASAKI

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message to the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Nagasaki, 9 August:

Today, people around the world join the citizens of Nagasaki in commemorating the many thousands who died when this city became the victim of a nuclear attack 68 years ago.

As we solemnly remember those who perished, we also pay our respects to the hibakusha and their families who survived. I have been enormously impressed by their determined efforts to educate the world about the full humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Their efforts will help to ensure that
these indiscriminate arms are never used again.

We must eliminate all nuclear weapons in order to eliminate the grave risk they pose to our world. This will require persistent efforts by all countries and peoples. A nuclear war would affect everyone, and all have a stake in preventing this nightmare.

We may take a lead from the scholars and researchers at Nagasaki University who have studied this issue, and strengthen disarmament and non-proliferation education worldwide so a younger generation of emerging leaders, voters, and taxpayers can understand the vital need for policies to advance disarmament goals.

I count on civil society groups worldwide to help inform the general public about the benefits of disarmament and the terrible risks of failing to achieve it. I also call for diplomatic coalitions of States to intensify their efforts to advance the global nuclear disarmament agenda.

I especially appeal to the States currently possessing nuclear weapons, particularly those with the largest nuclear arsenals, to agree on deep and verified reductions, stop developing new or modernized weapons, and accelerate their individual and collective efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

To the citizens of Nagasaki and likeminded people around the world, I assure you that you that the United Nations will be relentless in pursuing this goal. Nuclear disarmament is one of the greatest legacies we can pass on to future generations. Let us rededicate ourselves today to realizing this vision.

GLOBAL ZERO MOVEMENT

- [Our Movement | Global Zero](www.globalzero.org/our-movement)

Global Zero

Powered by a visionary group of 300 leaders and experts who support our bold, step-by-step plan to eliminate all nuclear weapons by 2030, the relentless ...

- [PDF]

Get the Action Plan - Global Zero


Global Zero
response to the growing threats of proliferation and nuclear terrorism and dedicated to achieving the phased, verified elimination of all nuclear weapons. Global ...

- **Global Zero: Demand Zero**

  www.globalzero.org/

Global Zero

There are more than 17000 nuclear weapons in nine countries. ... clear: the only way to eliminate the global nuclear danger is to eliminate all nuclear weapons.

- **Global Zero (campaign) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**

  en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Zero_(campaign)

Wikipedia

Jump to Action plan - [edit]. The Global Zero plan for the phased, verified elimination of all nuclear weapons is a four-phased strategy to reach a global ...

- **Nuclear weapons: Global Zero is coming - Avaaz**

  www.avaaz.org/en/time_to_global_zero/

Avaaz

A citizens' campaign calling for global zero -- the elimination of nuclear weapons in our world.

- **[PDF]**

  EN EN WRITTEN DECLARATION - European Parliament

  www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?...

European Parliament

Sep 10, 2012 - on support for the Global Zero Action Plan for the phased and verified elimination of all nuclear weapons worldwide. Jarosław Wałęsa ...

- **Global Zero - Valerie Plame Wilson**

  www.valerieplamewilson.com/overview/

Global Zero is the international movement for the elimination of all nuclear ... plan to eliminate nuclear weapons, built an international student movement with ...

- **389 Members of European Parliament support Global Zero ...**

  www.baselpeaceoffice.org/.../389-members-european-parliament-support...

May 21, 2013 - ... have signed a Written Declaration of Support for the Global Zero Action Plan for the phased and verified elimination of all nuclear weapons ...
Global Zero: the United Nations, diplomacy and eliminating...
www.baselpeaceoffice.org/.../global-zero-united-nations-diplomacy-and-...

Global Zero promo calling on UN Security Council to eliminate all WMD ...
The Global Zero plan for the elimination of nuclear weapons has already gained some ...

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International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
The World Council of Churches pushes for a prohibition on nuclear weapons. July 10th 2014. Following its week-long Central Committee Meeting, the World ...
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3. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons ...
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The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a global civil society ... movement towards a process for a treaty banning nuclear weapons.
Launch - Mission - ICAN 2013 Civil Society Forum - Nuclear Abolition Week and ...

4. The Antinuclear Weapons Movement - SGI
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Soka Gakkai
Celebrating History of Soka Gakkai's Antinuclear Weapons Movement ... SGI's global peace movement, in which nuclear weapons abolition remains a primary ...

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6. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN ...
www.thereaganvision.org/international-campaign-to-abolish-nuclear-wea...
Resistance to abolition here was massive. These are shameful facts. Today there is a new abomination, nuclear weapons, and a new abolition movement.

7. Global Abolition - Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

An intra-governmental initiative to consider the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons could lead to international movement on establishing a treaty to ban ...

8. Read Declaration - Josei Toda  [www.joseitoda.org/vision/declaration/read](www.joseitoda.org/vision/declaration/read)

Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons ... Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen ...


The key part of the declaration reads as follows: "Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my ...


Abolition 2000 - No Nukes, No Wars! ... Nuclear weapons sneak through Glasgow – protestors arrested ... Posted: July 12th, 2014 under Movement News.


Yes!

In Japan, a Mothers’ Movement Against Nuclear Power ... David Krieger: The abolition of nuclear weapons is our responsibility, not a burden to pass on to our ...

Searches related to Nuclear Weapons Abolition Movement

abolish nuclear weapons
should nuclear weapons be abolished
reasons to abolish nuclear weapons
international campaign to abolish nuclear weapons
international campaign to abolish nuclear weapons (ican)
ten reasons to abolish nuclear weapons

TWO REVIEWS OF ELAINE SCARRY’S NUCLEAR MONARCHY:

Craig Lambert
Richard Rhodes

Harvard Magazine
Nuclear Weapons or Democracy

“Out of ratio” weapons are essentially ungovernable.

by Craig Lambert.  Photograph by Jim Harrison, Elaine Scarry

March-April 2014

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KEYWORDS democracy, Elaine Scarry, nuclear weapons, U.S. Constitution

[I read this in The War Crimes Times (Summer 2014). –Dick]

THE MOST FATEFUL OBJECT yet to appear on this planet could be the “nuclear briefcase,” or “nuclear football,” a 40-pound titanium case containing top-secret information and tools that enable the president of the United States to launch a nuclear strike. The president carries authentication codes to assure recipients that the source of any nuclear orders is actually the Commander in Chief. When the president is away from the White House, a military officer with the nation’s highest security clearance (“Yankee White”) always remains nearby with this doomsday device, at times cabled to his wrist.

Due to the extraordinary secretiveness surrounding nuclear matters, Americans have no idea how many times presidents may have opened the nuclear briefcase or its equivalent. We do know that Eisenhower considered using nuclear weapons twice, during the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1954 and a flare-up over Berlin in 1959; Ike also delegated the power to launch a strike to certain military commanders if he were unavailable. Former secretary of defense Robert McNamara, M.B.A. ’39, LL.D. ’62, said, late in his life, that John F. Kennedy ’40, LL.D. ’56, came “within a hairbreadth of nuclear catastrophe” three times—this in a presidency lasting only 34 months. Lyndon Johnson contemplated deploying nuclear arms to prevent China from building them. Richard Nixon considered using them three times—other than in Vietnam—including one case in which North Korea shot down a U.S. reconnaissance plane in 1969.

“The crucial point is that there’s an interval of 30 or 40 years between those incidents and our learning about them,” says Elaine Scarry, Cabot professor of aesthetics and the general theory of value. “We wrongly assume that the Cuban missile crisis is the model: ‘when the world is at risk, we know it.’ Well, we don’t know it. In eight of these nine cases, we didn’t have a clue. Do we want to simply guess about something like this, where millions of people stand to be killed? We assume there would have to be a huge problem for us to contemplate such a thing. Like, for example, shooting down a reconnaissance plane?

“It’s widely acknowledged that nuclear weapons are incredibly susceptible to accidental use or to seizure by a non-state actor or terrorist,” Scarry continues. “But what has been insufficiently recognized is the biggest danger of all: the belief that there is some ‘legitimate’ possession of these weapons, that we are safe as long as there’s government oversight of them. In fact, they
are utterly incompatible with governance.”

In her new book, *Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing Between Democracy and Doom* (W.W. Norton), Scarry argues that the very existence of nuclear arsenals is irreconcilable with the U.S. Constitution and in fact betrays the basic purpose of the social contract that governs any civil society: forestalling injurious behavior. “Nuclear weapons undo governments, and undo anything that could be meant by democracy,” she says. “They put the population completely outside the realm of overseeing our entry into war—or having a say in their own survival or destruction. We have to choose between nuclear weapons and democracy.”

IN HER BOOK, Scarry asserts that the United States, “...a country formerly dependent on its population, its legislature, and its executive acting in concert for any act of defense—has now largely eliminated its population and its legislature from the sphere of defense, and relies exclusively on its executive.”

Nuclear weapons are monarchic. Along with other weapons of mass destruction, they are what Scarry calls “out-of-ratio” weapons: ones that give a very small number of people the power to annihilate very large numbers of people. “An out-of-ratio weapon makes the presence of the population at the authorization end [of an attack] a structural impossibility,” she writes. “New weapons inevitably change the nature of warfare,” she says, “but out-of-ratio weapons have changed the nature of government.”

In a practical sense, the speed and scale of an incoming nuclear attack make the notion of congressional authorization of war ridiculous; such arms are fundamentally beyond democratic control. “We had a choice: get rid of nuclear weapons or get rid of Congress and the citizens,” Scarry explains. “We got rid of Congress and the citizens.”

Since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, American presidents have been well aware that having a finger on the nuclear trigger gives them monstrous power that dwarfs the petty squabbles of day-to-day political life. During the 1974 impeachment proceedings of Richard Nixon, he told the press, “I can go into my office and pick up the telephone, and in 25 minutes 70 million people will be dead.”

The concentration of such outsized violent force in the hands of the American president (and of the leaders of the other eight nuclear powers) has, Scarry argues, largely undermined the three-part design of government that the framers of the Constitution created to separate legislative, judicial, and executive power. Instead, Washington has become like a three-handed poker game in which one player holds all the high cards and billions of chips.
In Article I, Section 8:11, the Constitution insists on a congressional declaration for war to take place, Scarry says, yet, “since the invention of atomic weapons, there has not been a formal congressional declaration of war.” (The closest case was Congress’s conditional declaration for the Gulf War.) *Thermonuclear Monarchy* describes the five cases of declared war in American history: the War of 1812, the Mexican War of 1846, the Spanish-American War, and the two World Wars. Scarry remarks on “how majestic Congress was in those cases.”

**THE AWESOME POWER** that nuclear weapons invest in the executive branch essentially disables the legislative one, she writes. “[O]nce Congress was stripped of its responsibility for overseeing war—as happened the moment atomic weapons were invented—it was, in effect, infantilized….Now, six decades later, book after book has appeared describing Congress as ‘dysfunctional’ or ‘dead.’ Once Congress regains its authority over war, however, there is every reason to believe it will travel back along the reverse path, reacquiring the stature, intelligence, eloquence, and commitment to the population it once had.”

Civic stature and military stature are intimately linked. Scarry points to the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which enfranchised African-American men. It came on the heels of the Civil War, in which 180,000 black soldiers fought; given this, blacks could hardly be denied the right to vote. Similarly, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, was ratified after many teenaged soldiers had fought and died in the Vietnam War.

“It is tempting to think that a country with monarchic arrangements in the realm of nuclear war can maintain a more attractive form of government throughout the rest of its civil fabric,” she writes. “That would be a mistake. A country is its arrangements for national defense…."

The Constitution and, more generally, the social contract, purposely make it difficult to go to war. Scarry’s book makes clear that the social contract arises from the need to prevent the injuries that people living in groups so often cause one another. The solution involves putting brakes on the concentration of power. “The only way you can civilize force is to distribute it: give everyone a small share,” she says, adding that the Second Amendment’s insistence on the citizens’ right to bear arms underlines this principle. Urging that military powers be held within the social contract, John Locke similarly warned, she notes, that anyone is “in a much worse condition, who is exposed to the arbitrary power of one man, who has the command of 100,000, than he that is exposed to the arbitrary power of 100,000 single men.” Nuclear weapons eliminate individual soldiers; they condense the injuring power that formerly depended on thousands of soldiers into a single weapon, and place it at the disposal of a solitary leader.

“Actions that cause major injury, like going to war, require collective decisionmaking—which gives
a great braking power," she says. “You don’t want to put impediments in the way of the good things in life—things like liberty, lovemaking, party-going, studying, helping others. The social contract puts impediments in the way of one thing: injury.”

War surely causes more injury and death than any other action arising from human intentions, and the Constitution (written in the wake of the Revolutionary War) puts a double brake on warfare. War must pass through two gates to become a reality. One is Congress, with its responsibility (now shirked) to declare war. The second brake is the general population. “The mere fact that you required the citizens to fight meant that the citizenry could say yes or no,” she explains. “A war doesn’t get fought if the population doesn’t want it fought.

“People like to say, ‘Soldiers obey—they do what they’re told,’” she continues. “It’s not true. Soldiers do what they are told, but they do it thoughtfully—and sometimes they don’t. The War of 1812 ended when it did because the population, including soldiers and sailors, did not feel strong support for it. There were soldier strikes all over England and Canada at the end of World War I; Winston Churchill wrote to Lloyd George saying he wanted to go into Russia to support the Whites against the Reds, ‘but the soldiers won’t let me.’ A big reason the South lost the Civil War was that 250,000 soldiers deserted; every time Robert E. Lee looked over his shoulder, he saw a smaller army. Soldiers ratify a war.”

THE SECRECY that cloaks nuclear policy and the technical aspects of nuclear arms—what happens in the private huddles between a president and his advisers, for example—keeps these policies insulated from any genuine, searching critique, she believes. Even the weapons themselves remain sequestered in deep-sea waters, high in the sky, or at remote land locations in Wyoming, Montana, or North Dakota, for example. It can be difficult even to communicate with the military personnel trusted to oversee them.

The USS Rhode Island is one of 18 Ohio class submarines armed with nuclear ballistic or guided missiles that patrol the world’s waters. Its armaments can destroy all human, animal, and plant life on a continent. When deeply submerged, as in wartime or any moment of high political tension, Scarry writes, “…it can o-n-l-y-r-e-c-e-i-v-e-t-i-n-y-a-m-o-u-n-t-s-o-f-i-n-f-o-r-m-a-t-i-o-n-v-e-r-y-v-e-r-y-s-l-o-w-l-y. In fact, the first three letters of the hyphenated message would have taken fifteen minutes to arrive, and the submarine would have had no way to confirm its receipt of the letters.” The information gets conveyed, she explains, “…in Extremely Low Frequency (or ELF) waves, giant radio waves each 2500 miles in length that can (unlike any other band of the electromagnetic spectrum) penetrate the ocean depths. Until 2004, ELF waves were launched by a giant antenna in Michigan and Wisconsin that is eighteen acres in size.” (The Navy has not disclosed the successor to ELF.)
The nuclear-armed submarine, then, is an obscenely powerful engine of destruction and death that, at the most critical moments, seems all but incommunicado. Thermonuclear Monarchy builds on this: “...to say nuclear weapons are ‘ungovernable’ is to say that they are unreachable by the human will, the populations of the earth can have no access to them.... The membrane that separates us from their lethal corridors is one-directional: the weapons may suddenly unzip the barrier, erupt into our world, eliminate us; but we cannot, standing on the other side, unzip the barrier, step into their world, and eliminate them.” She elaborates: “People say, ‘Once something is invented it can’t be un-invented.’ What are we talking about? These things we’ve invented can kill and destroy the whole earth, but we can’t get rid of them? Of course we can.”

The Ohio class submarines nicely epitomize the furtiveness of the nuclear world. Eight new ones were launched between 1989 and 1997, during the years of the so-called “peace dividend.” Each of these subs carries nuclear weapons with eight times the total blast power expended by all Allied and Axis countries in World War II. The 14 Trident II SSBNs (ballistic-missile launching submarines) have, among them, the firepower to kill all life on 14 continents. “There are only seven continents,” Scarry dryly remarks. Even so, news reports did not cover the launching, christening, and commissioning of any of these submarines, even in the states whose names they bore.

The shroud of secrecy keeps the general citizenry ignorant of basic facts about the nation’s nuclear arrangements. Most Americans do not realize that the country has a first-use policy. A 2004 poll found that the majority estimated that the United States has 200 nuclear weapons; the actual current figure is 7,700. Meanwhile, 73 percent of Americans say they want the total elimination of nuclear weapons, as do similar proportions of Russians and Canadians.

The United States and Russia are now reducing their stockpiles of nuclear warheads in accordance with negotiated agreements. This is a positive step, Scarry says, though she cautions that the reductions in forces “may simply be a way to retire obsolete weapons to make way for newer ones.” (Twelve more Ohio class submarines are slated for construction between 2019 and 2035.)

RECENT SCIENTIFIC WORK on the “nuclear winter” (the hypothetical climate change following a nuclear exchange), Scarry reports, indicates that any country launching a nuclear attack would be committing suicide—rendering the weapons, in effect, unusable. An exchange that exploded as little as 0.015 percent of the world’s nuclear arsenal—say, between lesser nuclear powers like India and Pakistan—could leave 44 million dead immediately—and one billion more people likely to perish in the following month, given the effect on food supplies and the disruption of agriculture.
During the Cuban missile crisis, President John F. Kennedy stated that the United States had no quarrel with the Cuban people or the Soviet people. But, Scarry says, “These weapons are not designed for a showdown of political leaders. They are going to massacre the citizens. No weapon ever invented has remained unused. Does anyone think that in the next 100 years, one of these governments that has them, won’t use them?”

In a 2005 Foreign Policy essay, “Apocalypse Soon,” Robert McNamara bluntly declared, “U.S. nuclear weapons policy [is] immoral, illegal, militarily unnecessary and dreadfully dangerous.” Scarry agrees, and declares, “Nuclear weapons have to be gotten rid of, worldwide. But this cannot be done if the United States is just sitting there with this huge arsenal, which dwarfs what any other nation has. We worry about Iran and North Korea and the huge existential threat if these countries get nuclear weapons. What is mysterious, though, is that we fail to see the huge existential threat that we pose to the world with what is by far the most powerful nuclear arsenal anywhere.”

In 1995, 78 countries asked the International Court of Justice to declare nuclear arms illegal. In response, the U.S. Departments of Defense and State jointly argued that using, and even making first use of, nuclear weapons does not violate any treaty regarding human rights or the environment. Nor would the death of millions via a nuclear attack violate the 1948 UN convention on genocide; they asserted that “genocide” applies only to the annihilation of national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups.

Scarry instead suggests that the United States act in concert with other nuclear nations, all using their constitutions, to dismantle and permanently eliminate these weapons. The first step, she says, is “reanimating our awareness that we are responsible—we are in control, or should be in control, of our self-defense.” Restoring the military draft would help return responsibility for decisions about war to the whole population, and make political leaders far more accountable to the citizenry. “Little by little, the importance of the Constitution has been obscured,” she states. “We should require Congress to oversee our entry into war. A president who does not get a congressional declaration should no longer be president. That is absolutely an impeachable offense. The population has to see how important this provision is.” Furthermore, in negotiations for nuclear disarmament, “if those who are negotiating know that the population is insisting that these weapons be eliminated—rather than just leaving it up to a handful of negotiators—that will help them as negotiators.

“There is no transparency if you’re waiting 30 or 40 years to get the information,” she continues. “Presidents ought to report about close calls, for example. Maybe each year in the State of the Union address, the president should have to say how many times a nuclear option was considered in the past year. And we ought to feel that it is our responsibility to ask about these things. History has to show that we tried.”
In an earlier book, Scarry analyzed the events of 9/11, showing how the citizens on Flight 93 were able to act effectively to disrupt the terrorists' planned mission. “They deliberated, they actually voted, and they acted to bring down that plane,” she says. “Whereas the Pentagon could not even defend the Pentagon, let alone the rest of the country: their habits and training were all directed toward this idea of war with a foreign country. The fighter jets at first flew off away from the coast, in the wrong direction. But terrorists like the shoe bomber—undone by fellow passengers. The so-called Christmas bomber in Detroit—undone by passengers. The Times Square car bomb—an ordinary vendor noticed something wrong.”

Perhaps millions of citizens will find something wrong with a far greater bomb threat, and defuse it. Scarry ends the first chapter of Thermonuclear Monarchy with a challenge. “The two artifacts, the social contract and the nuclear array, are mutually exclusive,” she writes. “To exist each requires that the other be destroyed. Which one will it be?”

Craig A. Lambert ’69, Ph.D. ’78, is deputy editor of this magazine.
The problem posed by nuclear weapons — that they work by holding their possessors hostage, with the threat of catastrophic retaliation if used — has confounded thinking about them since the beginning of the nuclear age. One of its earliest analysts, the American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, the first director of the Manhattan Project’s Los Alamos laboratory, which developed the atomic bomb, once compared the two dominant nuclear powers of his day and ours, the United States and Russia, to “scorpions in a bottle, each capable of killing the other, but only at the risk of his own life.” Oppenheimer chose not to note that scorpions, a species almost as well known for belligerence as Homo sapiens, would sooner or later take that risk. We humans have not done so, at least not so far. But while circling each other warily during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union occupied themselves with stockpiling enough weapons to freeze out food production with nuclear winter and destroy the human world.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was some expectation that nuclear weapons might be recognized as Cold War relics, irrelevant in a less polarized world and a common danger to all. Encouragingly, four nuclear states — Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and South Africa — voluntarily disarmed. But these most destructive of weapons turned out to have apparent value as guarantors of national security and tokens of national prestige. The superpowers negotiated reductions in their arsenals even as a secondary wave of proliferation began or continued in Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea, while Iran and Iraq have so far been restrained from going nuclear with either a combination of threats and rewards or actual invasion.

Today there are still about 17,300 nuclear weapons in the world, most of them American or Russian, with a combined destructive force equivalent to 1,500 pounds of TNT for each and every man, woman and child on earth. The detonation of even a fraction of this stockpile could produce a worldwide Chernobyl, followed by a new ice age of dark starvation. Not even Dante imagined a fate so cruel for humankind.

“Thermonuclear Monarchy” is only the latest in a long series of efforts to think through the question of how to eliminate these terrible and useless weapons, efforts that go back all the way to the 1946 Acheson-Lilienthal Report, prepared by a group of experts led by Oppenheimer himself for submission to the newly formed United Nations. Elaine Scarry’s book is perhaps most famously preceded by Jonathan Schell’s “The Fate of the Earth” from 1982. Scarry is a literary critic and social theorist who teaches at Harvard, best known for her highly original 1985 book, “The Body in Pain,” an examination of the role of wounding in the authentication of belief.

That earlier work broke new ground. From it I learned to understand why wounding and killing in war might lead to victory or surrender even well short of the total annihilation of the enemy. There are useful insights in “Thermonuclear Monarchy” as well, but over all it fails to persuade. It explores the baleful political consequences of limiting the control of nuclear weapons to a select few, and the authority to launch them to even fewer — in the case of the United States, to the president alone in what amounts to his monarchical power.

Scarry illustrates her point most effectively early on, quoting Richard Nixon in 1974, when he was threatened with impeachment. Revealingly, he told reporters, “I can go into my office and pick up
the telephone, and in 25 minutes 70 million people will be dead.” Well, he didn’t dare, and no one has dared since Harry Truman in 1945, in the last days of a long and terrible war, the worst in human history, hoping to put an end to it.

Why no one has dared, so far, is probably the crux of the matter, but that is not a story Scarry chooses to tell. Why we Americans collectively agree to tolerate concentrating world-destroying power in the hands of one fallible human being is another story Scarry bypasses, though it goes a long way toward explaining the peculiar logic or illogic of accumulating weapons so destructive that our only hope of surviving them has been to prepare to strike first and destroy an enemy’s weapons before he has time to launch them against us. Why our elected leaders continue to believe that such genocidal weapons are legitimate and moral in our hands, but illegitimate and immoral in the hands of our enemies, rather than eradicating them from the earth, as we did smallpox, is yet another mystery Scarry chooses not to investigate.

I am not reviewing the book Scarry didn’t write. In a 1999 interview she said she had already spent 13 years working on the subject of “Thermonuclear Monarchy,” and she has previously rehearsed most of its arguments in shorter essays and books. Twenty-eight years is surely a gestation sufficient to justify expecting a comprehensive examination of a problem, even so world-scale a problem as nuclear weapons.

Instead, Scarry constructs a legally interesting but highly abstract argument about the consent of the governed. She clarifies what the Second Amendment was about before it was trivialized into merely a guarantee of personal pistol-packing. That amendment, she says, provided a second level of consent by the people, after the consent of both houses of Congress, to a president’s taking the nation into war, a level enforced by tens of thousands of personal decisions about whether to shoulder one’s rifle, don one’s kit and field cap, and muster strong. It’s an inspiring picture, but Congress long ago ceded most of its war-making power to the imperial presidency, and the termination of the draft after popular resistance to the (undeclared) Vietnam War mooted the “well regulated militia” of the amendment. A professional army, however often and obsequiously we thank it for its heroism, ultimately answers to the commander in chief, not to the people.

Scarry also explores some curious corners of the nuclear issue. The description of how Switzerland has prepared its citizens to survive at least the initial effects of a nuclear war, retreating into shelters and drawing in their national treasures behind them like the epiplastrons on a turtle’s shell, is charming, however futile it would be against the long, toxic darkness of nuclear winter. How emergency personnel, through training, prepare themselves to react quickly where the untrained might panic or freeze seems less than relevant with regard to a Congress hardly capable these days of reacting at all, much less moving rapidly enough to authorize a war under threat of nuclear attack.

It comes as no surprise, then, to arrive at the final page of this long-gestated, often eloquent if also often tedious book and find in its last paragraph the claim that the constitutional provisions for declaring war and mustering the militia only look like inadequate tools because “they are at present lying unused on the ground,” that “we should use whatever tool” — unspecified — “can best accomplish the dismantling,” and that “if there is a better tool, please tell us what it is, and help us to see how to use it.” I would have thought the rich literature of nuclear disarmament had already done that. The difficulty isn’t that the kit of tools is missing the right wrench. The difficulty,
despite several close calls, is that no one in authority believes the damned things will go off, and so everyone wants to play with them, like treasure hunters wallowing in a vault of golden coins laced with guardian scorpions, like children discovering the loaded gun their parents thoughtlessly neglected to lock away.

**THERMONUCLEAR MONARCHY**

Choosing Between Democracy and Doom

By Elaine Scarry

Illustrated. 582 pp. W. W. Norton & Company. $35.

**Richard Rhodes** is the author of “The Making of the Atomic Bomb” and three other volumes of nuclear history. His most recent book is “Hedy’s Folly: The Life and Breakthrough Inventions of Hedy Lamarr, the Most Beautiful Woman in the World.”

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**Contents Nuclear Weapons #19**

**Anti-Nuclear Organizations**

WAND in Action
Council for a Livable World

Latest No. of *Nukewatch Quarterly*

**Catholic Opposition to Nuclear Weapons**

Transform Now Ploughshares

*The Catholic Worker, (May 2014)*

Pax Christi

Wellen on Masco, Nuclear Weapons Scientists

*The New Yorker, a Recent Assessment of Dr. Strangelove*

Glenn Alcalay, Radiation Experiments in Pacific, Marshall Islands

Robert Alvarez, US Military Radioactive Wastes

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END NUCLEAR WEAPONS ABOLITION NEWSLETTER #20, July 20, 2014

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Newsletters

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