
Nuclear Energy and Warfare

Jawaharlal Nehru

We have found during the last two years a terrific pace of development in the art of warfare, both in the quality and effectiveness of the weapon and in the speed of delivery of that weapon, i.e. both, if you like, the hydrogen bomb and how rapidly it can be delivered at the other end. Now, as you know, it can be delivered at a much speedier rate than the speed of sound. So that we arrive at a stage when it is possible for a country that possesses the weapon to use it within two or three hours of the decision--within a few hours it can annihilate all the targets before it.

This is a terrific prospect. Within a few hours, because of both the speed of delivery and the effectiveness of the weapon, vast areas can be completely annihilated. Of course, only very very few countries possess that power and everybody knows that the two major countries, the U.S.A. and Soviet Russia, are supposed to be in possession of this weapon. But apart from this prospect, it has to be appreciated that even today it is possible, if a decision is once taken, in the course of a few hours or so to destroy

entirely large areas of the earth's surface. And remember also that this pace of development goes on.

I do not know what tomorrow might bring, but one thing is already clear; scientists may know what possible developments are likely in this thermo-nuclear age in regard to the effectiveness of these weapons--in regard to speed we have gone pretty far.

But a third prospect now comes before us - that of the aircraft which carries it being "uninhabited" as it is called, that is, it is a guided missile; no human being sits in it. That is the third stage of which we are on the threshold. All this terrible annihilation and destruction takes place really by the pressing of a button on the order being given, and this uninhabited aircraft carrying these terrible weapons goes off, guided by other methods and they do their work of destruction.

Now that is the prospect for humanity and it is a terrible prospect. And those persons, or that group, whoever it may be, who happens to be sitting with his finger on the trigger, has a terrible responsibility. And suddenly as a part of the cold-blooded decision, he may let loose the plug on others. That has always to be remembered by us, because all other activities and schemes may be completely ruined because of this happening. Therefore, a dominating factor in the modern world is this prospect of these terrible weapons suddenly coming into use before which our normal weapons are completely useless. And that is the background of atomic energy so far as war is concerned.

*From Speech delivered at the Scientists' Conference On The
Development of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes, New Delhi
26 November, 1954*