The Case for Unilateral Disarmament

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The world is passing through a crucial phase in its history. Science and technology have made such tremendous progress that they have made it possible for mankind to live in comfort and free from poverty and disease if only man knew how to utilise the opportunities offered to him and use them not for the purpose of exploitation or destruction but for the benefit of humanity at large. On the other hand, this advance in science and technology has created a situation which may well lead to the destruction of civilization and the annihilation of mankind, should man be foolish and short-sighted enough to abuse and misuse the opportunities and advantages which science and technology have to offer.

It is only necessary to realise the danger involved in the nuclear race to rouse the conscience of mankind and check this mad competition. If it were only a question affecting two combatants, who could fight it out between themselves and destroy each other, one could sit back complacently and say: "If they are so minded let them do their worst to each other and be damned." But unfortunately much more is at stake. It is the future of humanity. Combatants or opposing nations are as much involved in it as non-combatants and neutrals. The slaughter of the innocent and the guilty alike on a mass scale is bad enough. It becomes infinitely worse if not only the living but also many generations of those yet to be born are doomed to be afflicted with congenital physical and mental defects. The non-aligned and neutral

people are as much involved in this as those who are knowingly engaged in the criminal conspiracy of creating weapons and conditions that would spell their own annihilation no less than that of others.

There is no known defence against a nuclear attack once it is launched. The only thing that the target country can do is to perfect a system of instant retaliation that would be able to function even when the rest of the country has been reduced to an atomic wreckage. It can however be poor consolation to the victim of a nuclear attack to know that after he has been wiped out of existence a similar fate would overtake the adversary.

It has further been said that the only way to prevent a nuclear war is to develop an adequate nuclear deterrent. To buttress this argument it is pointed out that it was only the knowledge that if they used poison gas the Allied nations would not hesitate to retaliate in kind, which prevented the Axis Powers from employing poison gas in the last World War.

Even if deterrence succeeds, the mounting scale of expenditure on armaments resulting from the nuclear arms race will be such as to impoverish the nations concerned and deprive mankind of much of the fruits of scientific advance. According to a report sponsored by the National Planning Association of America, produced by men who were not concerned in any anti-nuclear campaign, the United States was in 1958 "spending 45 billion dollars per annum on military preparation. In the United States about 10 per cent of the gross national product is now devoted to military purposes. It is estimated that 15 per cent of the gross national product of the Soviet Union is similarly devoted. If the world goes on as it is, neither better nor worse, it is estimated that

from the present time till 1970, from 1,500 to 2,000 billion dollars will have been spent on armaments; but this will certainly prove to be an underestimate, since new inventions will necessitate increasingly expensive weapons."

A race for nuclear weapons of which the nuclear tests are an index, if it remains unchecked, can thus have only three possible results:

- (1) It may lead to a thermo-nuclear war between East and West which will result in the annihilation of whole populations on either side, destroy civilization and turn the world into a radio-active wasteland.
- (2) Or, as Bertrand Russell points out, assaults on heavenly bodies by the competing powers may take the place of exploding nuclear weapons in the attempt by each to demonstrate its superior counterforce capacity to the other side. "It may well happen", says Bertrand Russell, "that means will be found to cause them [the terrestrial bodies] to disintegrate. The moon may split and crumble and melt. Poisonous fragments may fall on Moscow and Washington or more innocent regions. Hate and destructiveness having become cosmic will spread madness beyond its present terrestrial confines."
- (3) The insane race for supremacy in thermo-nuclear weapons may lead to the financial bankruptcy of the countries concerned and turn the whole world into a vast slum inhabited by fear-ridden neurotics, like the philosophers of Laputa in Dean Swift's satire.

How is it, one may ask, that with all these disastrous consequences of nuclear warfare staring them in the face, the powers still engage in the nuclear arms race? Why Why cannot they agree to stop the ruinous competition and dump their armaments into the sea, or where their capacity for damage is destroyed? The reason is that both sides are in the grip of mutual fear, suspicion and distrust, and these do not make for sanity. The only cure for fear, Mahatma Gandhi taught us, is faith; for suspicion sincerity; and for distrust trust.

We have seen disarmament conferences dragging on their weary course endlessly only to bog down in a morass of equivocation and double talk. Diplomats hold forth on disarmament but are not prepared to abjure war. They talk about peace but have a mental reservation about the renunciation of force.

The straightest and the simplest way to break through this vicious circle would be for all powers to abjure the use of force altogether, and this must be reflected in their domestic policies. There may be an agreement to enforce collective sanctions, economic and other, not involving the use of force, against any power that violates the agreed code.

In the alternative if any one country taking courage in both hands unilaterally disarms, it would break this vicious circle of mutual fear and distrust and pave the way for universal disarmament. Such a nation would go down in history as the benefactor of mankind and the world will not allow it to fall a victim to aggression. Mankind has advanced in thought. The conscience of the world has been awakened. We have, of late, witnessed one African country after another achieve independence, not by the use of military force but under pressure of world opinion. It will, however, be said that charity should begin at home. India has had the unique privilege of engaging in a successful non-violent struggle for

independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. She should set the example if her appeal for unilateral disarmament is to carry any weight. I consider this to be a perfectly legitimate challenge. My appeal is addressed to India no less than to the other countries of the world.

It may be, however, that some other country is better qualified than India to take the lead in this respect and will succeed quicker than we. Mahatma Gandhi was once asked that since he, after fifty years of striving, had not been able on his own admission to demonstrate the full power of the non-violence of his conception, what chance was there for others to succeed even in a thousand years? He replied: "It may take some a thousand years, and it may take others only one year. Do not think that, if in spite of my fifty years' practice of it I am still imperfect, it must take you many more years. No, there is no rule of three here. You may succeed quicker than I."

He even envisaged some Western nation, by dint of its training in discipline and organisation, and its martial valour, attaining the goal of non-violence even before India, though he never ceased to hope that India would not allow itself to be beaten in the race.

Nuclear weapons, far from ensuring the triumph of one way of life or the other, only promise the extinction of all life. On the other hand, instances can be multiplied to show that military defeat, occupation and annexation of a country did not result in the disappearance of the nation or its way of life: witness Poland, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, to mention only a few. During the last world war resistance movements sprang up in several countries under German occupation. The victims of Nazi aggression realised that capitulation by the forces of their respective Governments did not necessarily mean

the end of popular resistance to occupation. It was further noted that these movements were most successful where they were carried on, largely if not wholly, by moral, i.e. non-violent, means. An outstanding instance of this is provided by the resistance movement in Norway. Violent resistance, where it was tried, proved efficacious only to the extent to which it was the reflection of moral resistance, or the measure of the will to resist in terms of readiness to suffer, and of the intensity of sympathy and active or passive support of the thousands of non-terrorists.

The employment of nuclear weapons is only part of the technique of frightfulness. The idea behind it is that if the tyrant can demonstrate his undoubted capacity to exterminate the adversary, the latter is bound to submit. But if the adversary learns the art of dying without submission or a sense of defeat, if he develops the awareness that there is in us something which the armaments cannot destroy and which survives even the destruction of our physical body, the power of armaments, nuclear or other, will be sterilised. For it is not the physical destruction of the adversary that the tyrant desires as a rule, but only to bend him to his will. "At the back of the policy of terrorism", observed Mahatma Gandhi, "is the assumption that terrorism, if applied in a sufficient measure, will produce the desired result, namely, bending the adversary to the tyrant's will. But supposing a people make up their mind that they will never do the tyrant's will and not retaliate with the tyrant's own methods, the tyrant will not find it worth his while to go on with his terrorism. If sufficient food is given to the tyrant a time will come when he will have had more than surfeit."

This was what happened in our own case. The British could have tried to put us down in 1930 by methods which they adopted in 1857 to suppress the Indian Revolt. But

we did not give them the chance, because we were, by and large, non-violent: and even though our non-violence was not of the purest type, it worked. Lord Irwin had to declare that his Government could not impose "the peace of the grave" on India even though they had the capacity.

Being asked whether the atom bomb had not rendered obsolete the weapon of non-violence, Gandhi answered: "No". On the contrary, non-violence was the only thing that was now left in the field, he said. "It is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy. I did not move a muscle when I first heard that the atom bomb had wiped out Hiroshima. On the contrary, I said to myself, 'Unless now the world adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind'."

To provide the antidote to the atom bomb, however, requires non-violence of the highest type. It may be asked whether this would not make too heavy a demand on human nature. Answering this question Gandhi said: "The critics gratuitously assume the impossibility of human nature, as it is constituted, responding to the strain involved in non-violent preparation. But that is begging the question. I say, "You have never tried the method on any scale. In so far as it has been tried, it has shown promising results."

After all, the change in our outlook and way of life demanded by Gandhi, by adopting non-violence or ahimsà is not more drastic than that resulting from our going in the opposite direction. It only requires foresight, faith and determination to leave the trodden path and chalk out a new one which would be for the benefit not only of the present generation but also countless generations to come. If we feel ourselves unable to undertake and achieve this at one step, let us at least make a move in

the right direction by banning all the nuclear tests as a preliminary step towards the removal of the threat to human survival that confronts us today, and thus give humanity breathing time to think out and adopt further steps to rid the world of fear, distrust and suspicion which lie at the root of violence.

Inaugural speech at the Anti-Nuclear Arms Convention, New Delhi 16, June 1962.