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# Nuclear Weapons and Steps Towards Responsible Reverence for Life

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## Nuclear Weapons and Steps Towards Responsible Reverence for Life Mr. Jonathan Granoff\*

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### *Reverence for Life*

After 30 years fighting for the abolition of nuclear weapons, I've come to realize that when talking about nuclear weapons it's all too easy for people to overlook their human impact. It is only when we are faced with the reality of what the use of these weapons costs us – our humanity – that we begin to understand the unacceptability of their use and threat of use.

My oldest son came to me one night 16 years ago and said, "Dad, I'm going to Japan." He was 16 years old at the time. And I said, "Oh, are you? And who's paying for it?" He said, "The American Friends Service Committee. I'm going with a group of American teenagers and we're going to interview survivors." So he went, and spent the summer in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When he came back, I asked, "What did you learn?" He said, "I learned one thing, dad. You know, on mom's side, we're Armenian and that part of our family suffered a genocide. On your side, we're Jewish and that part of the family also suffered a genocide. But I didn't really grasp it deeply until I went there. Now what has hit me is that to kill massive numbers of innocent people you first have to dehumanize them, and we can no longer afford to dehumanize anybody on the planet earth. Whatever political system is operating in any country what is most important is whether its policy makers exercise compassion."

I said, "Son, I am now your colleague. I'm not your teacher. I have not come much farther than this insight and I am still learning about it. We can learn together. "

I'm learning now that Albert Schweitzer understood this so clearly when he said, "Man can hardly recognize the devils of his own creation. Let me give you a definition of ethics. It is good to maintain and further life, it is bad to damage and destroy life. By having reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practicing reverence for life, we become good, deep and alive."

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### ***The Crisis We Face***

We are really in denial about the crisis we face regarding nuclear arms. Today, there are thousands of Russian nuclear weapons pointed at our country, just as there were at the height of the Cold War and we express our willingness to kill hundreds of millions of innocent people by pointing several thousand nuclear warheads at Russia. The renowned psychologist, Dr. Robert Jay Lifton, once said, “We are in a state of collective denial.” If we care about the future, we have to address this issue.

We are afraid that if we really look at what’s going on, we will have to commit to take action and do something meaningful. We will have to break out of our egocentric selfishness. We will have to commit to working to protect the great mystery of life. The way in which that mystery comes to us in this time is not the way it came to the generations before us and, hopefully, not the way it will come to future generations. We have created for the first time in human history mechanical devices which, if used, will end civilization and we live each day perpetuating the myth that we can rely on that these weapons will never be used by accident or design and that we can plan and live ignoring this daily threat. Is this realistic?

General Butler who was in charge of the targeting and readiness of the US arsenal during the 1990s stated that “accepting nuclear weapons as the ultimate arbiter of conflict condemns the world to live under a dark cloud of perpetual anxiety. Worse, it codifies mankind’s most murderous instincts as an acceptable resort when other options for resolving conflict fail.” He added, ‘I have spent years studying nuclear weapons effects...have investigated a distressing array of accidents and incidents involving strategic weapons and forces... I came away from that experience deeply troubled by what I see as the burden of building and maintaining nuclear arsenals ... the grotesquely destructive war plans, the daily operational risks, and the constant prospect of a crisis that would hold the fate of entire societies at risk.”

Without even addressing the threats posed by terrorists getting the weapons, the possibility of a rogue military unit taking irresponsible action, a normal conflict between nations spiraling out of control, or any unforeseen occasion, let me recount as examples several instances that should get us all motivated to work to end this unacceptable risk.

### ***Where Fallibility Dooms, Human Conscience Saves***

In September 1983, Colonel Stanislav Petrov was the Air Defense officer on duty at the Serpukhov-15 bunker near Moscow, which housed the command center of the Soviet Early Warning System. His job was to watch for any possible threat on the satellite’s early warning network and notify his superiors of any impending nuclear missile attack against the Soviet Union. While he was on duty, a computer error indicated a full-scale launch by the United States. Colonel Petrov did not pass the

information up the chain of command because he knew that if he did, the amount of time and the protocols still left enough room so that a return launching at the United States was almost certain before the missiles hit the Soviet Union.

Because of Col. Petrov's insubordination, we are here today. No man should have to carry that burden on his shoulders. I've had the privilege of interviewing Col. Petrov for a documentary. I asked him what gave him the humility and courage to make such a decision. He said, "Well, two things...first, that I didn't believe that God wanted the world to end and, second, I was a computer engineer and I know they make mistakes."

When I was I was interning for a congressman in Washington, D.C. in the mid 1960s, a small group of us had lunch with Senator Robert Kennedy. He told us what really happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis. I've since participated in several public dialogues with Robert McNamara, who was the Secretary of Defense during the Crisis. Both Robert Kennedy and McNamara told me the same thing. We had the most knowledgeable, most competent, most professional, most well-informed, caring leadership that you could possibly put together, but that we came all too close to ending civilization nevertheless.

McNamara has told me we based our policy on the premise that we couldn't allow nuclear weapons to become operational in Cuba. We have since discovered that there were already over 90 fully-operational nuclear weapons in Cuba at the time of the missile crisis, with field commanders having authority to launch if there was an invasion. Some of our military leaders did, in fact, want an invasion.

Kennedy and McNamara both said that good luck played a major role in saving the world. That has stuck with me.

Can we not do better in our planning than relying on good luck to correct our very fallible human condition? Nuclear weapons leave very little margin for error.

Imagine it is 3 AM and computers at three US military command centers have picked up simultaneously over 200 missiles from the then Soviet Union headed for the United States. On November 9, 1979, the Pentagon's National Military Command Center, the Alternate Military Command Center in Fort Ritchie, Maryland and the American Aerospace Defense Command in Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs had top officials intensely assessing what appeared to be the imminence of a nuclear attack. Minutemen missile launch control centers in the Midwest were readied and expected the worst. The National Emergency Airborne Command Post – the President's Doomsday Plane – was ordered into the air, without the President. As President Carter's national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was preparing to call him, the threat was reassessed at 2,200 missiles, enough to end the United States, and probably by fall out and nuclear winter, the entirety of civilization.

Mr. Brzezinski never made the call for at the last minute, and let us be clear the entire exercise of terror took place in a mere matter of minutes, he was informed that the satellites designed to detect launches and early warning radar systems indicated that there was no missile attack. What had happened to bring us so close to catastrophe?

Senator Charles Percy of Illinois was touring a defense facility and officers wanted to impress upon him the seriousness of their mission. One of the technicians had mistakenly put a very realistic training tape into the wrong computer. In the predawn of November 9, 1979, the world's fate hung in the balance of but a few people and a few minutes.

President Reagan said it so clearly: "Six minutes to decide how to respond to a blip on a radar scope and decide whether to unleash Armageddon! How could anyone apply reason at a time like that?"

I am reminded of how in January of 1995 the Russians mistook a weather satellite for a nuclear weapon launch from a submarine off the coast of Norway and the future dangled in the balance of but a few men for an eternal few minutes.

I urge you to think about how little time is given decision makers in Pakistan and India as we sit here today.

### ***Faulty Thinking, Suicidal Thinking***

Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara has stated a really simple point. He says if we use nuclear weapons against states that have them, it's suicidal; if we use them against states that don't have them, it is morally unacceptable and incomprehensible. These weapons don't have any use against terrorists; therefore, we should get rid of them.

We also have a legal duty to get rid of them. The International Court of Justice has unanimously ruled that the nations of the world must negotiate their elimination. In Article VI of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the United States, along with China, Russia, the UK, and France, has pledged to 182 non-nuclear weapon states that it would negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons... That was the core bargain of the treaty that Richard Nixon helped bring into force in 1970.

Ronald Reagan was absolutely right in condemning these terrible devices, saying they are "totally irrational, totally inhuman, good for nothing but killing, possibly destroying life on earth and civilization." George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Bill Perry and Sam Nunn, among the most conservative so-called realists among the country's political leaders, recently co-authored an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* that called for the elimination of nuclear weapons, stating clearly that we cannot stop their spread if we don't deliver on our part of the promise to work for disarmament.

No one is saying we are going to see the elimination of these nuclear weapons overnight. Abolition is a necessary compass point and steps that lead us in that



direction should be followed and those that take us toward reaffirming perpetual reliance on nuclear weapons should be avoided. It would be irresponsible to just unilaterally get rid of them. No credible serious person in this field is saying that. We cannot allow the compass point to shift from abolition to taking the incoherent position that “the weapons are OK; we just can’t let bad people have them.” That is, we must not take the position of the National Rifle Association’s attitude toward hand guns. That would be saying that the weapons themselves are not bad, they are only bad when in the hands of bad people. Because of their indiscriminate and overwhelming destructive capacity, nuclear weapons themselves are abhorrent in anyone’s hands.

### ***The Axis of Responsibility***

We are responsible for the time in which we live. I think there is an axis of responsibility, and I want to discuss a new way to think about nuclear weapons that clarifies their present context and one that you can share with your colleagues.

Today, technology and social organization have extended the reach of this generation into the future, and to be responsible human beings we must seriously reflect on our duties to those yet to come. This level of responsibility is new to humankind. Our great-grandparents did not face this kind of decision. We are the first generation that really has to decide consciously whether we are going to be the last. Because science and technology have extended our grasp, we have to think about our ability to destroy this planet, not only for us, but for generations to come.

I believe there is an axis of responsibility. Three interconnected issues will determine whether we successfully fulfill our duty to pass on a sustainable future. They are: alleviating global poverty, protecting the global commons and eliminating nuclear weapons.

The first of these is that we must effectively address crushing poverty when half of the world’s population is living on less than \$2 a day. And what that suggests is that the relationship between labor and reward has broken down. For the vast majority of humanity, no matter how hard they work, their condition doesn’t change. Furthermore, fully one-third of the world’s population does not have clean potable water. That’s what crushing poverty is.

The second and third axes are adequately organizing ourselves to protect the global commons (the oceans, rainforests, and climate, the living systems on which civilization depends) and eliminating nuclear weapons before they eliminate us. These axes will determine whether we even have a destiny at all.

Globalization reminds us that we are, in fact, one human family. We, therefore, can’t afford to dehumanize anybody. Healthy people know that nurturing a family is a crucible of training wherein the principle of learning to care for others determines success more effectively than dominance. It is through our family experiences that we

learn the bonds of caring, supporting and nurturing each other; the values of belonging, cooperation, coexistence and community. Each of us knows from our own family experience these simple principles that we now have to apply globally. Has this ever been necessary before?

The spiritual admonitions of the wise, such as Albert Schweitzer, have now become practical imperatives. The wise have always said to treat life sacredly and to see the human family as one. But now it has become a practical necessity. Now you see people like former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Schultz saying we've got to get rid of nuclear weapons because there is a conjunction between the moral and the practical as never before.

### *Protecting the Commons*

No nation can be secure when the living systems upon which everyone depends are at risk. Climate change will lead to radical changes in food production and increase the likelihood of disease pandemics. It will cause population displacement leading to instability and conflict. Rainforest destruction, whether it occurs in Brazil, Canada or anywhere, destroys the lungs of the planet and the air we all need to breathe. If one country is allowed to dump its wastes into the oceans, then all countries can dump toxic chemicals and life-destroying wastes through that country's flag. We must protect the ocean's biodiversity and the fishing stock, seventy percent of which are now at risk. Is there anyone so naïve as to think that climate change will exempt any country, including the United States, from its destructive forces?

There are core questions we must ask ourselves. Will we achieve the necessary cooperation to protect these living systems in a world where nuclear weapons are claimed to be legitimate in the hands of a few and denied to everybody else? Will the level of cooperation in which countries forsake short-term economic opportunity for long-term environmental responsibility take place when they feel threatened by nuclear weapons, when they feel that their security is given second-class treatment? Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, South Africa, Argentina, will these nations all make those sacrifices? Will China, will India, in a nuclear apartheid world where some say we have superior security? Will that cooperation take place?

It's time that we created an international environmental protection agency because we have discovered that the environment is one interconnected global system. It's time that we entered into the Kyoto Protocols and protected the climate. It's time that we created an international renewable energy agency that President Carter had the foresight to call for as far back as 1976.

### *Poverty and Sustainable Development*

Can we survive in a world where we have forgotten the lessons of the Marshall Plan? After World War I, we punished Germany and we ended up crushing their economy and planting the seeds of the next war. After World War II, we had a

Marshall Plan with Japan and Germany, designed to develop the vanquished, an expression of our highest values, and we ended up with trading partners and peace. There is no reason for us to not apply those principles globally, and that's what the Millennium Development Goals, to which our country has committed, are all about.

### *Towards a World Without Nuclear Weapons*

Security in all of its aspects must be redefined as integrated and based on cooperation, engagement, law and shared interests. We cannot sustain a world where the security for some is valued more than the security for others. The greatest present requirement is equilibrium in the quest for common security. Put another way: equity brings stability, inequity brings instability.

We have nuclear apartheid and that will continue to breed instability. Ninety-six percent of the over 25,000 nuclear weapons in the world are in the hands of two countries, the United States and Russia. The weapons that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as horrible as they are—and they are unimaginably horrible—were “only” 12 and 15 kilotons, respectively. One kiloton is the destructive equivalent of about 1000 tons of TNT. The weapons in our arsenal now are in the megaton range. A megaton represents the destructive capacity of a million tons of TNT. It's just inconceivable. They are so unimaginably destructive.

My political mentor, Senator Alan Cranston, used to say nuclear weapons are unworthy of civilization, and the only security against their spread and use is their universal, legally verifiable elimination. And every step toward that must enhance security, promote the rule of law, and not diminish any country's security.

What are the things that we need to do to achieve this goal?

First, pledge never to test any nuclear weapons again and make sure that nobody else tests them.

Second, we need to promote nuclear-weapons-free zones.

Third, don't make any more of the materials that terrorists could get and make bombs with.

Fourth, make sure that cities are no longer targeted. Why should cities be targeted? They are not military targets. Targeting a city is terrorism. Now, why do we have thousands of weapons pointed at Russia? I was over there a few months ago; I can tell you that Russian people are passionate about becoming capitalists. They don't have communism anymore. Why are we still targeting them? You can't imagine how much they want to emulate everything in our culture: the good, the bad and even the ugly.

The US has allocated funds and taken steps to set up a missile defense system in Eastern Europe to protect against non-existent Iranian missiles. The Russians say that a U.S. missile defense system based in Poland and the Czech Republic won't work against Russian missiles and is not positioned in a logical place to defend against non-existent Iranian missiles. Nevertheless, the Russians say that they feel threatened by the system and are thus building new nuclear weapons to overcome it. Does anyone today in the US actually think Russia has plans to take conquer the US? Do we want to conquer or rather annihilate Russia? Why do we allow this madness to continue? It is time that the nuclear madness ended so that we can pursue the necessary cooperation to address the two other issues of the axis of responsibility.

The three issues that comprise the axes of responsibility are interconnected, because all three of the issues of poverty, the commons, and nuclear weapons require global cooperation.

### ***Three Questions***

So this is the action plan that I would like all of us to come out with in addition to joining organizations that are addressing these core issues.

I would like everyone here to ask every single person who leads a major institution and all those who are running for political office to answer these three questions:

1) What are your plans to address crushing poverty and ensure sustainable livelihoods and productive, just employment? What are your plans to deal with poverty? It's a very simple question. If they say, 'We have a plan... it's called the Millennium Development Goals,' there are plans, but let's ask them... answer this question, "What are your plans?"

2) What are your plans to protect the global commons such as the oceans, the climate, the rainforests, the living systems upon which civilization depends? What are your plans? There are plans to carry out protocols, there are lots of plans, there are treaties that we are not signing. There are plans to do this.

3) What are your plans to eliminate nuclear weapons?

These three questions should be asked of political candidates of all parties, including congressmen and mayors. Mayors in the thousands have joined Mayors for Peace led by Mayor Akiba of Hiroshima and have stepped up on these issues. Surprisingly, mayors seem more cognizant of these global issues than Congressmen and Senators. The questions are not should we deal with poverty, not should we protect the global commons, not should we get rid of nuclear weapons? Rather, they are what are your plans to do it? Reframe the issue.

And if everybody here gets ten of their friends to ask these questions, and ask them to get ten of their friends through the Internet, these questions might get into our public debate and we might actually become grown ups and become responsible and might actually pass on a sustainable future.

### ***Conclusion***

If we answer these questions correctly, generations to come will say, “A change took place at a particular point in time,” and they will say thank you. And we will do justice to the memory of those innocent women and children who died unnecessarily as the subjects of the bombs struck on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their legacy will be properly honored; they will have said the gifts of science and technology have been brought under rational control with the power of law and morality, and that morality was known so clearly by Albert Schweitzer: Life, every life, this next breath that you get is a gift and sacred and precious and it is sacred and precious for every living being.

In closing, I want to thank David Ives, for stepping up on this issue of nuclear arms and properly representing one of the greatest men of modern times, Dr. Albert Schweitzer. I want to thank Quinnipiac University for hosting and giving a home in which the message of the “Reverence for Life”, Albert Schweitzer’s message, can be alive, can be spread and can take root.

Thank you.

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**Jonathan Granoff**, President of the Global Security Institute, is also Co-Chair of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Senior Advisor to National Security Committee of the International Law Section of the American Bar Association. He serves on numerous governing and advisory boards including the Global Dialogue Institute, Middle Powers Initiative, Jane Goodall Institute, and the Bipartisan Security Group.

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Jonathan Granoff has lectured worldwide emphasizing the legal, ethical and spiritual dimensions of human development and security, with a specific focus on the threats posed by nuclear weapons. He is an award-winning screenwriter, and has been featured in more than 30 publications.

**The Global Security Institute** is dedicated to strengthening international cooperation and security based on the rule of law, with a particular focus on nuclear arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. GSI was founded by Senator Alan Cranston whose insight that nuclear weapons are impractical, unacceptably risky, and unworthy of civilization continues to inspire GSI's efforts to contribute to a safer world. GSI has developed an exceptional team that includes former heads of state and government, distinguished diplomats, effective politicians, committed celebrities, religious leaders, Nobel Peace Laureates, disarmament and legal experts, and concerned citizens.

**The Albert Schweitzer Institute** was founded in 1984 as the Albert Schweitzer Memorial foundation and affiliated with Quinnipiac University in 2002. This affiliation has allowed the institute to sponsor several programs that not only carry on but invigorate Schweitzer's humanitarian legacy. The Albert Schweitzer Institute is committed to introducing Schweitzer's philosophy of "reverence for life" to a broad audience in order to bring about a more civil and ethical human society characterized by respect, responsibility, compassion and service.