

Carl R. Roger

**A PSYCHOLOGIST LOOKS AT NUCLEAR WAR:
ITS THREAT, ITS POSSIBLE PREVENTION**

This is an awesome time in the history of the world. It is entirely possible that we are approaching our doom. I wish to speak as a citizen of the United States, loyal to its principles and ideals. I wish to speak as a psychologist devoted to the enhancement of personal growth, and the improvement of human relationships. I want to voice my deep concern regarding the growing likelihood of nuclear war.

First I will point to some of the dreadful possibilities. Fritjof Capra is a highly respected theoretical physicist. In his new book, **The Turning Point** (1982), he says that an all-out nuclear war with Russia would mean that there would be a half billion dead after the first exchange. The entire war would be over in thirty to sixty minutes and almost no living thing would survive its consequences. The Pentagon plan for this war is known in the Defense Department as "Mutually Assured Destruction". The initials accurately describe it: MAD. Capra's information leads him to believe that the Pentagon has plans for a nuclear first strike against the Soviet Union in case of any direct military confrontation with the Russians anywhere in the world. Thus, an all-out war could start from some small local war in which the U.S. and the Russians confront each other indirectly through military forces they sponsor.

There is no such thing as a limited nuclear war. President Reagan's incredible remark, twice repeated, about the possibility of a nuclear war limited to Europe, and Secretary Haig's plan to fire off a nuclear weapon in Europe simply to demonstrate our capability to the Russians, show both a profound disregard for human life and an ignorance of governmental psychology. Suppose a limited nuclear war begins. One side will be the loser. Can anyone believe that the loser would not then push the all-out nuclear button? It would be inevitable. So a limited war means an all-out war.

Another dreadful fact is that the military in both of the super powers believe that a nuclear war can be won. George Bush, now our Vice President, when he was a candidate for the presidency, was interviewed by a reporter on the subject of nuclear war. He indicated that he believed that a nuclear war was

winnable. The reporter asked, "How do you win a nuclear exchange?" Bush: "You have a survivability of command in control, a survivability of industrial potential, protection of a percentage of your citizens, and you have a capability to inflict more damage on the opposition than they can inflict upon you. That's the way you can have a winner and the Soviets' planning is based on the ugly concept of a winner in a nuclear exchange/. Reporter: "You mean like 5% would survive? 2%?" Bush: "More than that. If everybody fired everything he had, you'd have more than that survive/. (**Los Angeles Times**, January 4, 1980) Some experts believe that as many as 15% might survive. But Bush is thinking incredible thoughts. My home city of San Diego has roughly a million inhabitants. Bush is saying that perhaps 850,000 of us would be killed, and only 150,000 would be left wandering about in deadly radioactive rubble. And he calls that winning!

Admiral Hyman Rickover, the father of nuclear submarines and an expert on nuclear warfare, was asked in the Senate hearing on January 28, 1982, what he thought of the prospects of nuclear war. His reply was essentially "I think we will destroy ourselves, and then perhaps a better, wiser species will emerge".

The Impact Now

What is the prospect of this incredible holocaust doing to us now? I believe that it is so horrendous that we often tend to trivialize it, or to deny its seriousness, or blot it completely out of our thinking. We refuse to grasp the **meaning** of its consequences. I believe that it is dynamics of this sort that help to account for the statements of Reagan, Haig and Bush, and the horrifying course upon which they have set our nation and our military might.

The utmost of this socially suicidal mentality was achieved in a speech on March 1, by the advisor to the President, Edwin Meese. He referred to nuclear war as "something less than desirable"!! (**Time**, March 29, 1982, p.20)

This trivialization of the horror of nuclear war is shown in the popular video games of missiles and satellites falling on cities. I observed members of a family playing such a game. The skylines of cities were on the lower edge of the screen; missiles and even more powerful satellites kept falling from the top of the screen and the game was to try to stop them in mid-air and explode them. But often they did get through and a common remark was "Oops, there goes your city!" We are making nuclear war thinkable by treating it as though it were just a game.

Within the young, who perhaps ponder more deeply about such things, it often produces a hopelessness. The National Urban League reports that among our young black people between the ages of 15 and 29, suicide has become the number one cause of death. This sobering fact is attributed not only to the

lack of opportunity, but to hopelessness about the future. Undoubtedly the possibility of a nuclear war plays a part in that hopelessness.

Last year, my granddaughter, Frances Fuchs, taught in a training program for adolescents who had been rejected by their schools. These were obviously not ordinary young people. Yet what she found is significant. Early in the term she asked them to write some paragraphs describing what they envisioned for themselves in five to ten years. The majority of them saw themselves dead in a thermonuclear holocaust or living desperate lives in a harsh, polluted, overcrowded world. (Fuchs, 1981) Here are a few quotes. *"In five years I will either be dead or in the Army or playing lead guitar in a band. I do think the war will come before five years and that most of us will be dead"*. *"I believe in five years if Reagan hasn't gotten us blown up that our natural resources will either disappear or they will be very difficult to get hold of. I really think that in five years I will be dead or really, really bad off"*. Or, from a young alcoholic, *"I drink to get wasted. I drink whenever I feel like it and I enjoy the high I get. When I get drunk, it feels great. Nothing seems to matter"*. How many other young people see no more positive possibilities for their future than to get wasted?

So that's what the prospect of nuclear war is doing to some of our young people. It hangs as a black cloud over all of us, but the young are especially sensitive and aware and especially hopeless.

Are these young people too gloomy? What is the view of those scientists, physicists and engineers who understand the technology of the situation? According to Capra, many of them have two blind spots. (1) They are employed by the military-industrial complex to build nuclear weapons or by the nuclear power industry to build nuclear power plants. (2) They often see only a narrow, or fragmented view of their own task and have no conception of how it all fits together. Consequently, the only experts who can provide an unbiased and comprehensive assessment of the situation are those who are independent of nuclear development and, not surprisingly, they all tend to be in the anti-nuclear movement. Those who know the most are the most strongly opposed to the steps we are taking toward nuclear war, as the work and publications of the Union of Concerned Scientists clearly shows.

And what about military men who know the plans and strategies for nuclear war? The Center for Defense Information strongly opposes nuclear war, the senseless arms race, the escalating military budget. And who are its leaders? Two Rear Admirals of the Navy, and a Major General of the Marines. They have all been deeply involved in planning nuclear war. Now retired, they are devoting full time to try to stop our self-destructive military policies. So it is clear: those who really know nuclear possibilities are most deeply committed to **stopping** the arms race, and **stopping it now!**

Prevention

What can we do to prevent the possibility of a nuclear war? Psychologists have made valuable proposals as to steps that might be taken. Perhaps the most exciting is Charles Osgood's plan for "Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-Reduction" (GRIT).

Very briefly, he proposes that a nation can take unilateral action to reduce tension. President Kennedy was acting in accordance with Osgood's principles when on June 10, 1963, he declared that the United States would stop all nuclear testing in the atmosphere, and would not resume such tests unless another nation continued them. On June 15th, Krushchev welcomed this step and ordered a halt in the production of Russian strategic bombers. On June 20th Russia, after long previous delay, agreed to the "hot line" between the two leaders. In July the stalled test-ban treaty was earnestly negotiated, and in August it was signed. Kennedy approved a large sale of wheat to the U.S.S.R. The sequence was halted by his assassination.

Put in more general terms, one nation, without reducing its capacity to wage war, takes a step toward reducing tension. This involves a small but manageable risk. Its intent is announced in advance. The opposing nation is invited to verify that the action has been taken, and invited to reciprocate. If it does reciprocate, a further step can be taken by the first nation. Gradually tension is reduced. The Russians called the 1963 actions "the policy of mutual example". Although the "experiment" was so brief, the relationship between the two nations perceptibly improved.

Osgood's 1962 book, **An Alternative to War and Surrender** should be carefully restudied by all of us, especially by those in government.

Dealing with Social Tensions

I want to discuss at greater length another pathway to prevention, where I can speak from personal experience.

We know a great deal about how to establish communication between hostile or feuding groups, and to aid them in the reconciliation of their interests and desires. I will briefly describe a few examples. But first I would like to point out the psychological pattern that exists in such a situation. The pattern is always fundamentally the same. One group feels, "It is perfectly clear that we are right and you are wrong. We are good and you are bad. Consequently, the only possible solution to the problem is our solution: X." But the other group has identical feelings. "We are right and you are wrong. We are good and you are bad. Consequently, the only satisfactory solution to the problem is our solution: Y." One of the greatest difficulties in any dispute is to

recognize, and even more difficult, to **accept** that the certitude we feel about our own rightness and goodness is equalled by the certitude of the opposing group about its rightness and goodness. If tension is to be reduced, it is this pattern that must somehow be dissolved. Here is where a facilitative approach has often been successful.

One example involving much bitter confrontation was the conference of the National Health Council several years ago. It is an organization made up of representatives of the American Medical Association, dental associations, nurses organizations, health insurance companies, health-oriented agencies. The Council decided on this occasion that they, as "health providers", should invite to the conference a group of "health consumers", from the urban ghettos and the rural under-privileged. It was a courageous decision, but they only gradually realized the risk that was involved. The health consumers were selected by local groups. They were all poor, many black, some Chicano. As the time of the conference approached, the planners became uneasy and invited the staff of our Center to act as facilitators of groups at the conference. Though they could pay no more than our expenses, we accepted.

When the conference opened, the hostility of the consumers was so thick it was palpable. The conference threatened to split wide open. The consumers announced they were going to withdraw. It was very fortunate that we were there, also fortunate that we were receiving no fee. We were able to tell them in a very heated session that we had come all the way across the country, for no fee, simply to be certain that everyone in the conference had a chance really to express his or her own views and feelings, and to be **heard**. This statement held the conference together, though a split was still a possibility. Twenty groups of 20 to 25 each were formed, each containing both "providers" and "consumers", and each facilitated by one of our staff members. I remember well the group I facilitated. The bitterness of the group erupted in full force. Their anger at white professionals, at the lack of health services, at the lack of any voice in their own health care, was so strong that some of the professionals were frightened, while others were self-righteously angry in response. One black man, voicing his hatred of oppression, said that the Marines had trained him to kill and that if need be he would use that training against the people and institutions that were holding him down. The value of a facilitator who could truly understand and clarify the feelings expressed - even the very bitter emotions of two opponents - was most clearly demonstrated.

As the group sessions continued, there was a small, significant growth in mutual understanding. The white professionals began really to see their functioning as it appeared to the recipients. A ghetto member who **hated** health insurance companies realized that the insurance company executive in our group was not all bad and that they could communicate. A Chicana woman finally told fearfully how she felt totally scorned and uncared for by both blacks and whites.

During our sessions, the existing conflicts, such as those between haves and have-nots, between blacks and whites, between professionals and recipients, between establishment and radicals, burst into the open, but these violent outpourings occurred in a climate in which each person was permitted to state his or her feelings without interruption, a climate in which the facilitators showed that their caring concern was for the dignity of each person and their primary purpose was to understand each expression, and to foster open communication. In this atmosphere the issues became greatly clarified. What is perhaps equally important, persons emerged as separate unique individuals, each with his or her own perception of those issues. The labels - black, white, provider, consumer, conservative, radical - began to disappear. Little by little, real interpersonal communication began.

A surprising development was that the "consumers", though they had never known one another before, began to coalesce and take real leadership. A black woman, with little formal education, emerged as one of the strongest leaders, first in our group, and later in the conference as a whole. The "consumers" began to formulate resolutions. They were then told that it was the established policy of the Council not to adopt resolutions, that it was only a forum. Nevertheless, they persisted. By majority vote, after a long and heated discussion, they took over the last meeting of the conference, dismissed the speakers with thanks, and presented their resolutions, most of which were passed. A final astonishing fact is that during the following year most of those resolutions were put into effect by the National Council.

This is a good example of what can be accomplished by experienced facilitators. By accepting hostile and divergent opinions - some of the hostility directed toward the facilitators themselves - the most irrational of the feelings are somewhat defused by being fully expressed and by feedback from group members. Little by little, understanding and acceptance of other points of view develops. Confidence grows, both in the individual and in the group. There is a more realistic consideration of the issues, with less overload of irrationality. The group moves toward innovative, responsible and often revolutionary steps, steps which can now be taken in an atmosphere of realism. All of these things occurred in this particular conference.

I experienced another deep feud when I worked with a group from Belfast, Northern Ireland. There were five Protestants, including one Englishman, and four Catholics in the group. The nine were chosen to include extremists and moderates on both sides, men and women, older and younger. The Englishman was a retired Army Colonel. Our group wanted to facilitate straightforward communication and to film this interaction. We only had funds enough to finance one long and intensive weekend.

In the early sessions, the bitterness, horror and despair of everyday life in Belfast was abundantly clear in the experience of the members: a sister blown to bits by a bomb; a family hiding behind mattresses as bullets struck their home; carrying away torn bodies, living and dead, from bomb explosions; the brutality of a British Army patrol to the teenaged sons of one of the mothers. Violently bitter feelings were expressed. The whole mixed stream of hatred and violence, of fear and despair, seemed so powerful that to think one weekend could possibly make any difference seemed incredibly visionary. During our sessions the hatreds and suspicions, the mistrusts of the two feuding groups were very evident, sometimes in covert form, gradually becoming more evident in their expression. Yet changes did occur. There were only sixteen hours of group interaction, yet during that very short period the centuries-old hatreds were not only softened, but in some instances deeply changed. So rapid was the progress, so significant the changes, that some of the statements made in the group had to be deleted from the film. To show such understanding of the opposition would have endangered the lives of the speakers when the film was shown in Belfast. This is again evidence that facilitative attitudes can create an atmosphere in which open expression can occur. Open expression in this kind of a climate leads to communication. Better communication very often leads to understanding, and understanding washes away many of the ancient barriers.

Though we had no funds to follow-up, the group continued to meet in Belfast and, to our surprise, offered to go in teams of two - one Protestant, one Catholic - to show the film in various groups with which they were connected, and to lead discussions. The best evidence of the film's effectiveness was that four copies of it were destroyed by extremist para-military men in both the Catholic and Protestant camps. They did not want the film shown, because it showed that reconciliation was possible.

I could tell of other experiences, such as the workshop at El Escorial in Spain, where 170 people from 22 nations gathered. They ranged in politics from Marxists to conservative capitalists, from priests to atheists, from old to young. National and racial hostilities were clearly evident, especially hostility toward the "imperialistic policies" of the United States. Yet during this ten-day workshop, in the presence of a facilitative climate, members began gradually to **hear** each other, then slowly to understand and respect. The large group, step by step, became in every sense a harmonious community. Not a community whose views were all similar - most assuredly not - but a community where individuals with their diverse views and convictions came to be understood and where persons and their differences were prized and respected. Individuals felt empowered to take more risk in developing themselves, and in carrying through constructive social actions.

On the basis of these experiences, I feel it is not too much to say that if feuding parties are willing to meet in the same room, and willing even to talk at each other, steps toward better understanding and more constructive actions are almost certain to ensue, if there are skilled facilitators present who can understand and accept the diverse, hostile, fearful attitudes which are expressed.

The International Level

You may feel this is all very well with conferences and encounter groups, but such a process could not possibly help with international issues, where we are dealing with large political entities. In this connection, I would like to call your attention to the Camp David experience. I have no way of knowing whether President Carter had any psychological advice, but the Camp David sessions had many of the qualities of an intensive group experience, such as I have described, and many of its outcomes were similar. In the first place, it was informal. There was no protocol, no standing on ceremony, no formal attire. The leaders especially, and their staff members to some extent, met simply as persons.

Secondly, there were many facilitative efforts. In one tense and angry meeting near the beginning, Carter simply listened to Sadat and Begin. Then at the conclusion of the meeting he summarized, much as a facilitator might have done, the issues which had been raised by each leader. The difference was that he was able to state and clarify these issues in a calm and understanding way, where they had been expressed in highly emotional ways. On another occasion, when the hostility between Sadat and Begin ran too high, Carter acted as a facilitative intermediary, carrying messages back and forth until they were willing to meet again. (Dayan, 1981)

Another important facet of the experience was that it was self-contained and private. There were no on-lookers. No members of the media were admitted. Consequently, there was no advantage to putting up a facade for the world to see. It was also possible to make tentative and exploratory statements, without being held to these views. They could simply talk together as persons.

Another similarity to the intensive group experience was the "pressure cooker" aspect. For twelve days these men were kept in constant contact with each other. To be in close communicative contact, for a considerable period of time, with someone with whom you violently disagree, together with a person who can act as facilitator, almost inevitably leads to a better understanding and greater acceptance of the other. While President Carter was far from neutral, and sometimes more of a persuader than a facilitator, he did serve a very facilitative function.

There were two notable outcomes. First, these two world leaders, starting from very divergent points of view, were able to come to a major agreement on constructive next steps. The second outcome is astonishing. Begin and Sadat were almost violently hostile toward each other at the outset. At the end of the twelve days, they felt sufficiently warm toward each other that they embraced on public television. Here is definite evidence that the same kind of process can work with world leaders as operates in workshop groups. To be sure, there were deficiencies. There was insufficient inclusion of all staff members in the interchange. There appears to have been no recognition of and no preparation for the familiar "back home" problem, in which the participant finds that he has moved away from his own constituency toward a more conciliatory point of view. There were other deficiencies, but Camp David marks a new step in international negotiation. It affirms the potentialities of the intensive group experience. It is a model which should be utilized and improved.

Application to the Nuclear Situation

Does this process of communication and improved mutual understanding have any application to the international nuclear tension? I believe it does. I wish to look at the general psychological context and then at the more specific possibilities.

In the **people** there appears to be a will toward peace. In Europe millions are making known their desire to stop the deployment of nuclear missiles. This movement is making its strength felt. As I write this, news comes of the election in West Germany, where the result is attributed to the anti-nuclear protest. The U.S. government is trying to discount it by saying that it is communist-inspired. But it acknowledges its power.

In the United States, the millions are just beginning to move. A Gallup poll in June, 1981, showed that 72% of the American public wanted the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to stop building nuclear weapons. There is great support for a bilateral nuclear weapons freeze, a proposal that both nations "halt the testing, production and further deployment of all nuclear weapons . . . in a way that can be checked and verified by both sides".

And in Russia? Our information is scanty, but Russia lost 20 **million** dead and an equal number injured in World War II. The dread of war is even **greater** among the Russian people than in ours. Two Russian dissidents give us a current picture of the attitudes of their countrymen. (Medvedev & Medvedev, 1982) According to these writers, the people live in great and understandable fear of the United States. They are especially fearful of an American nuclear first strike.

There is, then, every reason to believe that many millions of people in many countries, desire peace. If that desire is strongly voiced by massive numbers, it can stop the two governments in their disastrous course. We have evidence of this in my country. It was public protest which eventually stopped the Vietnam war.

What is needed is a great popular uprising to bring a halt to the step-by-step escalation toward nuclear war. President Dwight Eisenhower, not a flaming radical, said it well many years ago.

"Some day the demand for disarmament by hundreds of millions, will, I hope, become so universal and so insistent, that no man, no men, can withstand it. We have to mobilize the hundreds of millions; we have to make them understand the choice is theirs. We have to make the young people see to it, that they need not be the victims of the Third World War".

Those millions are beginning to move, to be heard.

The goal of this movement must be twofold: to stop the nuclear buildup and nuclear threats; and to substitute a process making for peace. The need for this positive program cannot be overstated.

The first step is to change the policy of the United States government. At the present time the top officials show not the slightest intention of wishing to have peace with Russia, or of wishing to understand the Russians, or of trying to work out a peaceful solution to our mutual problems. They make phony proposals, knowing in advance that they cannot be accepted by Russia. They and their supporters are a perfect example of the pattern of which I spoke. "We are right and good. You are wrong and bad". This very accurately describes their attitude. Threat seems to be almost their only diplomatic tool. We excoriate Russia for its invasion of Afghanistan, and its part in the military dictatorship in Poland. We threaten to cut off any negotiations as a punishment for their actions. Deplorable as those actions are, we should view them with some humility, in view of our own conduct in Vietnam, Chile, and El Salvador.

The present stance of the American government must be changed. We need to **communicate** with the Russian people. We need to try to understand their point of view. We need to help them understand our point of view. We need to **dialogue** with them, at official and unofficial levels. This will not be easy to achieve. But in meetings of government officials, in professional conferences, in business contacts, and with Russian visitors, we need to encourage dialogue. Experienced facilitators, where needed, can be drawn from other countries.

We need to bring pressure on the government of the United States to embark on a serious, vigorous program of communication with the U.S.S.R. and the Russian people.

We pour billions into creating redundant nuclear weapons, sufficient to destroy the planet many times over. We need to put some of that money and energy to work in pursuing, developing, expanding the communicative process that leads toward peaceful reconciliation. We have the models. We need to put them to work. With a minute fraction of the dollars we spend for war, we could, as we know from experience and research, make definitive progress toward peaceful interaction which would prevent the holocaust from overwhelming us.

We have very little time. This is a life-and-death issue for all of us. Can we stop the drift toward destruction? We all have a responsibility in answering this question. It is to carry out my personal share of this responsibility that I have spoken out so strongly. I intend to continue. I hope you will join me - and millions of others - in working for a stop to our terrible insanity - the trend toward nuclear war.

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