

NUKE CLIMATE NEXUS: our response

by Bernie Meyer

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What do we do when storm clouds well up and are about to wreck havoc on our lives? What do you do? The ultimate storm clouds are welling up for not only human lives, our lives, but all life on our little planet floating in endless space. We are at a juncture, a juncture that we created, that is of our own doing. We created nuclear weapons, nuclear power, a whole system of radiation dispersal. We created a way of life that spews carbon dioxide, methane, and more chemicals into the atmosphere which circulates into the oceans and onto the continents and heats them up beyond our accustomed tolerance. What do we do? What will you do?

I am doing many things. Most prominently now I am confronting the powers by arrests to take stands saying we must stop the killing, we must change our ways. On May seventh I was arrested at Sub Base Bangor on the Hood Canal, home of the Trident nuclear submarine. On the weekend of May 13 to 15 I intended to risk arrest to “break free” from fossil fuels. (Emergency surgery on May eighth prevented me from participating.) Both of these human created entities are murderous and suicidal. Unless we confront them and control them, they will end us, as real as their murderous effects are even now experienced.

As Einstein said, “I don't know what will be used in the next world war, but the 4th will be fought with stones.” “The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our way of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe.” Gandhi: “Unless humanity adopts nonviolence, it will be suicidal for mankind.”

Scientists name climate change with the words Anthropocentric Climate Destruction (ACD). Anthropocene means the age of human making, human caused reality. With the initiation of the industrial age based on fossil fuels humanity invented a way of life dependent upon fuels generated over millions of years. What took millions of years to generate on Planet Earth are being consumed in a few hundred years. And, humanity cannot tolerate the increased heat as the power is continually increased. Humanity has never experienced the likes of this. Can the resilience of humans reverse course to limit the effects? The days are short and getting shorter. April 2016 was the seventh successive month of record global climate temperature increases, causing scientists to gasp. News is that the Arctic will turn from ice to blue heat absorbing water this 2016 summer, decades ahead of earlier projections.

There are many connections between nuclear weapons/power and the climate crisis besides the fact that humans are creators of each:

- Now, the United States has committed to the next generation of nuclear weapons by allocating one trillion dollars over the next ten years which includes new facilities. Not only that, the development of “small nuclear weapons” causes an appeal to usability. Other nations are following suit, including India and Pakistan. The nuclear club is growing.
- Nuclear war can cause drastic changes in climate. Scientists have studied the effects of a

nuclear exchange, whether it is between the US and Russia or between Pakistan and India (both possess 100 plus nuclear weapons.) The wastes sent up into the atmosphere would cause freezing of the earth, farming termination, and two billion deaths.

- Both nuclear war and climate change would cause three inter-generational effects. Nuclear testing has caused birth defects and early deaths already into the third and fourth generations. CO₂ into the atmosphere will last hundreds of years. Nuclear wastes have no way of disposal to date.
- Following the European Commission in 2008, the US Department of Defense in 2015 stated that “global climate change will have wide-ranging implications for US national security interests over the foreseeable future because it will aggravate existing problems – such as poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership, and weak political institutions – that threaten domestic stability in a number of countries.”
- Non-nation actors are a major concern for nuclear terror.

Is nuclear power an answer to abandoning fossil fuels? No:

- Nuclear power costs and construction time prohibit adequate response, let alone capability of replacing fossil fuels. While nuclear power has a decreasing percentage of energy generations, renewable energy capacity has been growing significantly.
- There are problems related to the nuclear “fuel cycle.” Beginning with the extraction of uranium from the earth leaving radioactive materials or tailings, to development, production, and use, ultimately waste, environmental and human effects remain at every phase.
- Nuclear waste disposal and climate engineering are technical attempts to bury the effects of nuclear technology and climate change.

The necessity of resolving both the climate crisis and nuclear issues demands international cooperation. One cannot be mitigated without the other:

- Long term goals and cooperation require conditions of trust and communication between nations on a world wide basis. How can the US work towards nuclear abolition or work on the climate crisis while surrounding Russia and China with bases and using NATO to participate?
- International Law is the most obvious tool to generate in conditions needed for mitigation.
- Litigation led by the Marshall Islands is being attempted to move beyond the lethargy preventing nuclear abolition.
- For humanity to overcome its mistakes in creating an unsustainable and suicidal way of life we must create cooperation and sustainable peace.

(This analysis about the nexus between nuclear weapons and the climate crisis was generated by the World Future Council and can be accessed at www.worldfuturecouncil.org.)

Most people in the US are unaware of the nuclear threats that exist whether from the possibility of accidents, misreading an event for an attack, the weapons on “Cold War” alert in Russia and the US, or perhaps most important the growing conflict between the US. and Russia. Ignorance abounds. Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the US adopted the Wolfowitz Doctrine in 1992: “Our first

objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.” (Paul Wolfowitz, 1992, according to Paul Craig Roberts, 11 May 2015) Since then, the US has fomented a coup in the Ukraine, converted NATO into a political and military force, and armed the nations surrounding Russia. Several people of note have warned about the slide which could result in a nuclear war. (I have been following the developments and have documentation from several sources.)

And, the situation is so deep that most cannot face it and ignore or deny it. What does it mean that we, that we the people, that we as humanity, are in this situation? Yes, humanity has now placed ourselves in this spot where all life on earth is threatened. Not even many of the storm clouds can be seen. Even the signs of destruction appear as hidden, even invisible. Maybe it is better to ignore with the possibility that the threat will go away and disappear! But, ... But, we have children. Generations come after us. What about them? A little thought about the droughts, the fires, the pollution, the melting Arctic, the changing weather, leads to the question, what about us? How vulnerable are we?

The genesis of our situation is revealed in the history of human endeavors to find meaning in seeking survival. We seek the meaning of life because we have the brain capable of reflection on the past and the future. The frontal cortex evolved beyond the primitive amygdala's fight or flight. Now, we can reflect on our bodies and see that they live and they die. What is this all about? Can and does life go on after death? Immortality? Of course, most of the average people circumscribe their thinking to their own self-interests and world-views, attempting to live a secure and ordinary life.

Years of study and reflection lead me to conclude with the words of Earnest Becker. Becker focuses on immortality as the prime human motivation. “We can see that the self-perpetuation of organisms is the basic motive for what is most distinctive about man—namely, religion. As Otto Rank put it, all religion springs, in the last analysis, ‘not so much from ... fear of natural death as of final destruction.’ But it is culture itself that embodies the transcendence of death in some form or other, whether it appears purely religious or not. It is very important for students of man to be clear about this: culture itself is sacred, since *it* is the ‘religion’ that assures in some way the perpetuation of its members.” *Escape From Evil*, p.4.

Religion currently is a term of dispute. I choose to bypass the dispute by saying that world-views regarded as absolute can be regarded as “religions” for those who hold absolute views of the life-symbolizing meanings. At risk of inadequately addressing this point of view I move to an observation about the implications for our present subject.

Robert Jay Lifton puts it in these terms: “Religious wars and persecutions are, at bottom, expressions of rivalry between contending claims to immortality and ultimate spiritual power. Religious victimization is a one-sided version of that process with the specific psychological functions of finding a target for death anxiety, sweeping away cosmological doubt, and achieving (or maintaining) revitalization.” *The Broken Connection*, p. 315.

In other words, The Bomb and/or our fossil fuel generated life style maintained by the almighty dollar serve us like god. In fact, those in power and those caught up in the power of power assume the power of god. We act like god when we choose the weapons or choose to attempt control of the environment. Lifton uses the word “nuclearism” for the nuclear weapon mindset. Rene Girard puts it in these words:

“[T]he Bomb does indeed seem like a prince of this world, enthroned above a host of priests and worshipers, who exist, it would seem, only to do it service ... Humans have always found peace in the shadow of their idols ... truly wonderful sense of the appropriate has guided the inventors of the most terrifying weapons to choose names that evoke ultimate violence in the most effective ways: names taken from the direst divinities in Greek mythology, like Titan, Poseidon and Saturn, the god who devoured his own children. We who sacrifice fabulous resources to fatten the most inhuman form of violence so that it will continue to protect us.” Quoted by Terrence J. Rynne in *GANDHI & JESUS, THE SAVING POWER OF NONVIOLENCE*, P. 152.

Humanity is not only at a survival juncture of existence. Humanity is at a moral juncture. Even now, we are tolerating the murderous effects of the nuclear experiment. We may be tolerating the suicidal possibility. (Refer Einstein's quote about not changing our way of thinking.)

Which road do we choose now? Do we even see a way out of this? We created the bomb, we initiated the fossil fuel based way of life. Intended or not, we facilitated the “anthropocene age.” Will those of us who see a new way take on those of us who like being gods for whatever reasons? I think we can choose one of three ways: bury ourselves in passivism, join the gods, or with courageous nonviolence and creativity take a stand.

I chose the third way long ago, imperfect as my choice has been. On May seventh I joined in with Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action by risking arrest and being arrested with Larry Kerschner, a Vietnam Veteran for Peace, and Gilberto Perez, a member of Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist community by blocking the Federal entrance to Sub Base Bangor. Bangor which houses eight Trident nuclear submarines, each with the capacity of twenty four D-5 missiles capable of targeting six to eight nuclear warheads of destructive power multiple times more than the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima. We have been resisting the Trident nuclear weapons for 38 years. In addition, I intended to participate in the Break Free actions at Anacortes from May 13 to 15. Due to emergency surgery I had to withdraw my participation. Anacortes is the location of the Shell and Tesoro oil refineries, where oil is processed to be shipped to Asia and around the United States. Unless we wean ourselves from fossil fuels we will send the climate over the edge of tolerance. Many of us think we may be over the edge now, but it can be much worse. By participating in these two actions within a week I intended to say that nukes and fossil fuel use together are mutually reinforcing as the above analysis indicates. We need to change our way of thinking. We need to be responsible. We need not just inventiveness. We need a sense of ethics and humility. We are not gods. We are human beings who have evolved from an animal nature. We are still part of nature. Nature will have the last word. As always, nature is negotiating with us as we give reign to our illusions.

As I was finishing this essay, Amy Goodman interviewed Noam Chomsky about this very subject: http://www.democracynow.org/2016/5/16/noam_chomsky_climate_change_nuclear_proliferation. The entire program on May 16th is relevant. Related to Trump positions, “Let's rush to the precipice.” But,

Trump is not the only threat. Chomsky touched some of my points too. Then, on May 17th, again with Chomsky, the headline was: Chomsky: “Today's Republican Party is a Candidate for Most Dangerous Organization in Human History.”

Without these political postures humanity faces a situation incomparable to anything in its existence. Add to that the mental state which Chomsky describes, words are totally inadequate. Our actions must speak louder than words in response.