

The time has come to abolish nuclear weapons

Étienne Godinot *



“Mechanical civilization has just reached its ultimate level of savagery,” wrote Albert Camus in his editorial in Combat on August 8, 1945, 80 years ago. “(...) Faced with the terrifying prospects opening up to humanity, we perceive even more clearly that peace is the only battle worth fighting. It is no longer a prayer, but an order that must rise up from the people to the governments, the order to choose definitively between hell and reason.”

And yet, over the course of the last 80 years, nine states have carried out 2,400 nuclear explosions, with well-known health and environmental consequences, and have wasted vast sums on strategic and tactical missiles, underground silos, and missile-launching submarines, at the expense of spending on education, health, and sustainable development.

To quote Jean-Marie Muller, *“The very existence of nuclear weapons constitutes the renunciation of civilization; it consecrates the failure of all moralities, all philosophies, all spiritualities, all forms of wisdom, all religions. Nuclear deterrence is the defeat of reason, the defeat of thought, the defeat of intelligence.”*¹

Just as Thomas Aquinas distinguished seven deadly sins, we can identify seven vices of nuclear deterrence: it is ineffective, dangerous, illegal, antidemocratic, demobilizing, immoral and ruinous.²

- Ineffective: Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, President of France from 1974 to 1981, wrote in his memoirs that he would never have used nuclear weapons against the USSR in the event of an invasion by Soviet tanks during the Cold War. There are many historical situations in which nuclear deterrence neither forced an aggressor to retreat nor prevented war. Today, French leaders have so little faith in the effectiveness of their deterrence that

¹ Jean-Marie Muller, *Libérer la France des armes nucléaires - La préméditation d’un crime contre l’humanité*, Chronique sociale, 2014

² See on this subject the text by IDN and ICAN-France [Vingt mensonges sur les armes nucléaires et comment y répondre](#) and IRNC’s slideshow [Les sept vices de l’arme nucléaire](#)

they are considering a “*one-off, non-renewable nuclear warning to indicate clearly to an aggressor state that the conflict has changed in nature and to reestablish deterrence.*”³ This in itself constitutes recognition of the failure of deterrence.

- **Dangerous:** Humanity has on several occasions been on the brink of destruction because of warlike provocations, human error, or technical failures. The "final warning" of French nuclear doctrine consists of a so-called "pre-strategic" strike not targeting urban centres, delivered from an airborne force. Can we really believe that a strike with a bomb twenty times that of Hiroshima in size would not mark the beginning of a nuclear war and "mutually assured destruction"⁴? Nuclear deterrence does not address the real sources of insecurity that our nations face today: blatant injustices and inequalities at the national and global levels, ideologies of hatred, domination, and exclusion, terrorism, cyberattacks, disinformation, attempts to divide national communities, transnational crime, drug trafficking, overflights by drones, etc.

- **Illegal:** Today, what is the credibility of French nuclear deterrence, when French military regulations prohibit soldiers, and therefore officers responsible for firing from France's nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, from obeying orders contrary to international law and morality?

- **Antidemocratic:** By virtue of the powers it confers on the head of state, nuclear weaponry de facto establishes an absolute monarchy by divine right which excludes the people and keeps them at a distance from decisions which concern their very existence.

- **Demobilizing:** Like the Maginot Line in the past in the face of Nazism, the main effect of nuclear deterrence, by making it rest solely on the head of state, is to demobilize the population with respect to its defence, and to leave it completely powerless in the event of a crisis or aggression, wherever it comes from.

- **Immoral:** The threatened use of nuclear weapons constitutes a premeditated crime against humanity, it is directly comparable to the hostage-taking of a whole civilian population, to state terrorism. French leaders practiced state terrorism in 1985 by committing an attack in a foreign port against the Rainbow Warrior, a ship belonging to a nonviolent organization, in the name of the so-called "higher interests" of their country.

- **Ruinous:** In order to ensure the perennity of its nuclear arsenal, France spent 12,048 euros per minute on nuclear weapons in 2024, a year in which the annual public deficit was 169.6 billion euros, or 5.8% of gross domestic product.

"*The time has come to recognize Palestine,*" President Macron solemnly declared at the UN on September 22. Likewise, as British and French citizens gathered today in London, we strongly affirm that the time has come to abolish nuclear weapons. The time has come to build a European and international security and peace order, which opens a path to a better future along several lines:

- **Playing our part in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,** by recognizing the responsibility of the peoples of Europe in anti-Judaism from the Middle Ages to the

³ Emmanuel Macron, 7 février 2020

⁴ L'équilibre de la terreur ou « destruction mutuelle assurée » (en anglais *Mutual Assured Destruction* : MAD : fou) est une doctrine de dissuasion nucléaire élaborée à l'époque de la Guerre froide et toujours en vigueur

Shoah and in the expropriation of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 (the Nakba), and by supporting those involved in the quest for justice, forgiveness and reconciliation;

- Firm support for both armed and nonviolent Ukrainian resistance against Russian aggression; documentation of war crimes and crimes against humanity with a view to prosecuting Russian leaders before the International Criminal Court; strengthening of economic sanctions and support for democratic Russians until the end of Russia's dictatorship;
- Coordinated fight by European countries against Russian cyberattacks and disinformation, harmonization of conventional weapons to drastically reduce costs, coordination of intelligence; protection against drone overflights;
- Promoting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) establishes a pernicious distinction between the five countries that have the "right" to possess nuclear weapons and the others that do not. Since its entry into force in 1970, it has proven its ineffectiveness, as demonstrated by the fact that the global stockpile 55 years later still comprises more than 12,000 nuclear weapons, representing the equivalent of more than 200,000 Hiroshima bombs.

This is why we call on our two countries to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), approved in 2017 at the UN by diplomatic delegations from 122 countries around the world. The TPNW entered into force in January 2021, and has been signed as of today by 99 states, and ratified by 74 of those.⁶ The TPNW prohibits its signatories from "*the development, testing, production, stockpiling, transfer, use, and threat of use of nuclear weapons.*" We call on Great Britain and France to send observers to the meetings of the States Parties to the TPNW, as a prelude to their joint and solemn accession to this treaty. This accession by two democratic countries will set an example for other nuclear powers to follow and will have a considerable impact in a world ravaged by wars and threatened by the madness of men.

- The history and practices of civil resistance against dictatorship and oppression to be taught from school-age onwards and in further education; implementation of civilian defence-based strategies involving non-cooperation with an aggressor or an authoritarian power, such as to make the resisting society economically unexploitable, politically ungovernable, and psychologically unbowed, and hence to make its submission by such an aggressor impossible. Let us not forget that it was not Western nuclear weapons that brought down Stalinist communism in Eastern Europe, but the nonviolent resistance of the civilian population⁷.
- Political and financial support for NGOs specializing in civilian peace intervention (Nonviolent Peaceforce, Peace Brigades International, etc.), and carrying out missions of observation, protection, interposition and mediation between belligerent parties in conflict zones;
- Reform of the UN Security Council; an ambitious international policy to combat poverty, global warming, the decline in biodiversity, and environmental destruction; an end

⁶ These countries include 5 of the most populated countries on the planet : Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh and Mexico.

⁷ *Solidarnosc* in Poland, *Charter 77* in Czechoslovakia, *Neues Forum* in East Germany, a human chain of more than two million people over 690 km between the three capitals of the Baltic countries in 1989, etc.

to arms sales to dictatorships and warmongers; political, financial, and logistical support for human rights organizations around the world; a European plan to retrieve from the Channel, the North Sea, and the Baltic Sea hundreds of thousands of tons of chemical weapons from the First and Second World Wars, which pose a major danger to marine environments.

Will humanity one day abolish war? This is our long-term hope, and it is also the vision of Victor Hugo (*“The day will come when a cannon will be shown in museums just as instruments of torture are shown today, and people will wonder that such things could ever have existed”*), following the prophet Isaiah (*“They will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles.”*). In the short term, at least, the time has come to abolish nuclear weapons.

The time has come for democrats and those seeking meaning, whatever their beliefs, to take a resolute dissenting stand and to resist purported nuclear Reasons of state.

The time has come for communities and their leaders, in all religious and spiritual traditions, to call upon their followers and upon all men and women of good will to rise up in conscience against the scandal and madness of atomic weapons.

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As a member of the Bourgogne Franche-Comté Collective for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, he has campaigned since 2018 for France's accession to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and for the [conversion to civilian use of the CEA-DAM site in Valduc](#), near Dijon, which maintains France's 290 atomic weapons.