

Second Place: 2018 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship
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On the 30th of October, 1926, a man named Henry Stimson checked into the Miyako Hotel - a hub for foreigners in Kyoto, Japan - for a five night stay. The fall colors were vibrant, the sun shone warmly, and the splendor of the old city was enough to calm the most restless of hearts.

Nineteen years later, in the waning days of July, 1945, Henry Stimson - acting in his capacity as U.S. Secretary of War - ordered that the city of Kyoto be removed from the top of the military's atomic bomb target list. By giving said directive, he actively prevented the destruction of thousands of temples, seventeen future World Heritage sites, and one-fifth of Japan's officially listed National Treasures. It is said that the thought of rendering such beauty as he had seen so many years ago into ashes had weighed heavily upon his mind for quite some time.

Yet in the same instant that he spared Kyoto, Henry Stimson also, by rational consequence, ordained that over two hundred thousand innocents would perish in hellfire in the early-August bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the time, both the American and Japanese public were presented with propaganda that described and depicted the opposite side as subhuman and inferior. FDR himself sought an explanation for Japanese antagonism from Aleš Hrdlička, an anthropologist at what would later become the Smithsonian Institute; Hrdlička, utilizing debunked phrenological pseudoscience, concluded that a two-thousand year deficit in cranial development was responsible for Japanese aggression.

Rehashing the motivations and moral principles behind the original advent and proliferation of nuclear weapons will not beckon a solution. Yet it cannot be denied that fear is at the core of nuclear armament. Individual nations continue to hold nuclear weapons out of fear of other holders, and prospective new holders develop them out of fear of current holders - thus creating more fear. This fear is projected and rationalized through the use of political factors as a national interest in defense; in reality, policies of escalation and stockpiling only perpetuate themselves self-referentially, in a cycle where the proffered justification for maintaining arms always involves the possession of arms by other entities.

In the words of Dr. Lawrence Freedman: "Emperor Deterrence may have no clothes, but he is still Emperor". Dozens of times throughout the 20th century, the nuclear powers made war by proxy against each other, and against nations or militias far inferior to them in weaponry and resources. But atomic arms did not prevent then-nonuclear China from intervening in the Korean War. They did not frighten the Afghan mujahideen into surrender. And they did not dissuade Iran from taking U.S. diplomats hostage.

Deterrence does not truly deter, and nuclear armament does not coerce - in the end it solves nothing, not even itself. By that arithmetic, confronting the issue of disarmament through current political wizardry - which attempts to address disarmament through a myopic framework of threat management - will not suffice. Rather, we must cast aside our fear of each other and approach disarmament through a framework of outright threat elimination. That's what is in the global interest - in humanity's interest.

Someone has to break this cyclicity, and it will take an act of great courage - an act of unilateral denuclearization, destined to be denounced as foolish or idealistic by many - to initiate such a departure from the ouroboros of nuclear armament. But once we have beaten our swords

into ploughshares and unshackled ourselves from fear, we will wonder why it was that we ever felt or made it necessary to forge such pointed irons to begin with.