

Lies and Nuclear Lies

Remarks at protest at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on the International Day of Peace, 2012

By [David Swanson](#)

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[War is a Crime](#)

Our government likes to lie to us about nuclear weapons. This poor impoverished nation halfway around the world is about to nuke us. No, that one is. The result, of course, is mass murder. But there's another result potentially even worse. We begin to think there's something wrong with being terrified of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. There isn't. This stuff should scare the hell out of us. And the arrogant lunacy of imagining that even an honest and accountable authority, much less our government, could set up a commission to regulate the winds of hell and deadly substances with a half-life as long as the age of the Earth must give us serious pause.

What are we thinking? How are we thinking? Are we thinking?

One Pentagon report documents 563 nuclear mistakes, malfunctions, and false alarms over the years so far — near misses, near apocalypses.

Soldiers in war sometimes learn to accept the senseless risk to their lives. But need our whole species and all the other species that we write off as collateral damage accept catastrophic risks as part of a permanent state of war? Or has accepting that risk in fact facilitated our acceptance of this permanent state of war? If nuclear weapons and nuclear energy were done away with, imagine the space that would open up in our minds for the possibility of living in peace and looking back on war as we look back on more small-scale forms of human sacrifice, and on cannibalism, slavery, or dueling.

In 1961 a U.S. B-52 with two nukes on board blew up over Faro, North Carolina. One of the bombs, with a parachute to slow it down, was found. Five of the six fuses designed to prevent full nuclear detonation had failed. The other nuclear bomb buried itself 20 feet deep in the ground, lighting up the sky like daylight. The military deemed that one hard to dig out, and left it there. And [there it sits](#). This little [mishap](#) involved bombs that were each 250 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. The commander of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team, Lt. Jack B. ReVelle, remarked, "How close was it to exploding? My opinion is damn close. You might now have a very large Bay of North Carolina if that thing had gone off."

On January 17, 1966, a U.S. B-52 carrying four live hydrogen bombs smashed into a tanker during midair refueling over Spain. Two of the bombs were blown apart like dirty bombs scattering radioactive particles all over Palomares, Spain. The United States dug up 1,400 tons of radioactive Spanish dirt and took it to Aiken, South Carolina, where the Savannah River Site has been producing nuclear weapons material, trying to dispose of the waste, and radiating people for over half a century, and where radiation was even recently detected

coming all the way from the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan.

In 2007, a U.S. crew accidentally (or as part of a secret plan; and I'm not sure which is worse) flew six live nuclear bombs from North Dakota to Louisiana and left them sitting there unguarded until the ground crew noticed.

If you doubt that these people will arm unmanned drones with nukes just because the drones tend to crash and malfunction, you haven't yet begun to grasp the sort of madness we're dealing with.

Uranium mining of the sort the profiteers now want to reopen in Virginia has spread cancer through every community it's touched. And the use of depleted uranium weapons has likely contributed to thousands of deaths and birth-defects in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and among members of the U.S. military and their families, not to mention the weapons' producers in places like Jonesborough, Tennessee. The United States has also sold DU weapons to 29 other countries.

There are three barriers to ridding the world of nuclear weapons. First, our governments don't represent us and will have to be compelled to act when and if we get our act together. We're too inclined to believe promises or even to pretend that certain politicians are secretly planning to be better than their promises. Or we take the rhetoric of the promises as an act of greater value than real policy changes would be. We allow our government to develop and test new nuclear weapons in violation of a treaty that Israel ignores and Iran complies with. Yet the Democratic Party Platform coming out of Charlotte says that if Iran does not stop violating a law it is not violating, we will attack Iran. Or, perhaps Israel will attack Iran with U.S. weapons and U.S. funding and U.S.-backed immunity for its crimes, while Democrats claim they had nothing to do with it and Republicans insist the United States should have led the assault — but within a day both will harmoniously back joining the escalating war. I'm glad Jill Stein is here and I'm glad she's running for president. I'm even gladder the rest of you are here at an event focused on policy change rather than personality change.

Second, people imagine we're safer spreading nukes around the globe by the thousands than we would be eliminating them while a few rogue non-state terrorists hang onto some. This is wrong. An arsenal of nukes doesn't discourage a terrorist. Nor can it discourage a state any more than can the non-nuclear weapons capable of complete devastation.

Third, people fantasize that there are advantages to nuclear energy that outweigh the problem of its technological vicinity to nuclear weaponry. There are not. Nuclear energy barely reproduces the amount of energy it takes to build and operate the plants; the waste materials cannot be put anywhere safe for 250,000 years; and the inevitable accidents pose such a risk that no private "free-market" insurance company will take it on. Nuclear energy is how India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea got nuclear weapons. It's also Israel's and the United States' excuse for threatening Iran.

When a country develops nuclear energy, as the United States encouraged Iran to do in my lifetime, it brings that country very close to developing nuclear weapons, which has become a leading excuse for launching and threatening wars. It doesn't help for the CIA to give Iran plans for building a bomb, but ridding the world of that sort of stupidity is just not within our reach. Ridding the world of nukes needs to take priority.

We often forget that a nation need not develop nuclear weapons if it wants to target an enemy that possesses nuclear power plants. The war planners are not afraid of a first strike from Iran but of an Iran that would be able to strike back. Sitting duck nuclear catastrophes waiting to happen — by accident or malice — exist in the form of nuclear power plants within 50 miles of 108 million people in the United States. Haruki Murakami, a Japanese novelist, commented on Fukushima: "This time no one dropped a bomb on us. . . . We set the stage, we committed the crime with our own hands, we are destroying our own lands, and we are destroying our own lives."

And no terrorist was needed. No enemy state was required. An earthquake or a flood could give cancer to millions of Americans too close to one of our aging nuclear plants. We've evolved as a species from the relative ease of gathering, hunting, and small-scale farming, to intense effort to create sources of energy that create little or no energy, and risk giving us all cancer, but prove our ability. Why did we climb that mountain? Because it was there. Why did we make nukes? To prove that we could. To make ourselves feel more competent. But true competence involves knowledge of limitations, restraint, and carefully measured action. I read a story yesterday about new potential in marijuana to cure cancer, rather than to give it to us. But we ban that substance in order to maintain our ability to think clearly. And yet our concept of what clear thinking involves needs an overhaul.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings, wrote William Wordsworth,

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:-

We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;

Close up those barren leaves;

Come forth, and bring with you a heart

That watches and receives.

Happy International Day of Peace.

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