

On Nuclearism: The Temptations and Unfulfilled Promises of a Timeless Fear. *Do You Still Love the Bomb? Have You Started to Worry Yet?*

Keywords

Nuclearism – Warhead – Proliferation – Imperialism – Colonialism

Abstract

Robert Jay Lifton devoted much of his career to highlighting the dangers of nuclearism. Nuclearism refers to policies centred on the proliferation of nuclear warheads, notably observed during the Cold War. In his books and articles, Lifton discusses the devastation caused by the use of these weapons, particularly in Japan, along with the widely acknowledged consequences of their proliferation and *testing*. Ultimately, Lifton champions progressive disarmament through democratic participation, arguing that even possessing such bombs could unpredictably influence foreign policy. For him, it is therefore essential to eliminate these arsenals, as their historical role, so to speak, has been entirely fulfilled.

Although this view is more than merely tenable, it is evident that the world is moving in the opposite direction. Since the initial tests conducted in the 1950s, the development of such devices has been considered by some as a hallmark of progress and modernity, as well as a sign of the overall advancement of civilisation. According to writers such as Lawrence, along with President Truman and Oppenheimer himself, possessing nuclear weapons sublimates the traditional practice of war. Here, Aristotelian potency reaches its climax or paradox: the atomic bomb fulfills its purpose when it is not deployed, winning its confrontation simply by its existence or the idea of its existence. As a warning or constant threat, nuclear weapons and their growing stockpiles deter the escalation of violence, regulate international relations, and ultimately secure peace on our planet. Or at least they did when the world became polarised by the presence of two superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. By that time, the ownership of atomic warheads was a privilege held by very few, making the uniqueness of the actors and parties essential for maintaining a substantial balance.

To this day, numerous countries still believe that a significant portion of modernity stems from nuclearism, which refers to the possession and capability to produce weapons of mass destruction. From this perspective, and even in violation of current international treaties, India's situation and that of other nations attempting to free themselves from colonial frameworks while perpetuating old patterns is telling. Indeed, the development and testing of such weapons necessitate practices of deforestation, depopulation, and widespread destruction, clearly harming less affluent and underrepresented social classes. Recently, however, new voices have emerged. Feminist authors are expressing their opposition to this *masculine notion* of development and control in an effort to transcend outdated strategies of tension. As is evident, the cost of these policies is excessively high, and dangers are always imminent.

In light of these considerations, my talk aims to retrace the history and the future of nuclear thought, seeking to clarify the reasons for this inveterate fascination and potential *dismantlement*.

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