

NUCLEAR WAR AND WORLD CITIZENSHIP

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Robert Hinde and Joseph Rotblat. *War No More: Eliminating Conflict in the Nuclear Age*. London and Sterling, Va.: Pluto P., 2003. Pp. x, 228. £40.00; US\$50.00; ISBN 0745321925 (hb). £11.99; US\$17.95 (pb).

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the Russell–Einstein Manifesto, which sought to put the world on guard against the hydrogen bomb’s dangers. The last surviving signatory to the manifesto was Joseph Rotblat, who died on 31 August 2005. In 1995, Rotblat and the Pugwash Conferences were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

During World War II, Joseph Rotblat participated in the Manhattan Project to develop an atomic bomb. An *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on his Nobel prize explains that “Although he was uncomfortable about participating in the creation of an atomic bomb, Rotblat initially believed that the weapon would be used only to deter a German threat. After learning in 1944 that it would be used to contain the Soviet Union, a World War II ally, he left the project....” Upon returning to England in 1945, Rotblat left defence work for medical research. He served as founding secretary-general and later as president of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, which began in 1957 and at which key scientists and others from different countries could confer about the peril of nuclear weapons facing the world. As a medical physicist at London University’s St. Bartholomew’s Hospital Medical College (1950–76), Rotblat directed attention toward the biological hazards of nuclear radiation and the severity of fallout from atmospheric testing. He worked closely with Russell in the 1950s and early ’60s and still visited him in his last years. (See his “Personal Reminiscences”, *Russell*, 18 [1998]: 5–24.) The book’s co-author, Robert Hinde, is the author of numerous books and articles in psychology.

The book addresses the planet’s current state in terms of weapons of mass destruction. It features many tables and charts on matters ranging from the varying levels of the super-powers’ nuclear warhead stockpiles to the principal nuclear arms control treaties to estimates of military deaths in individual wars during the last 60 years.

Since this book is an earnest endeavour to address the issue of weapons of mass destruction, many of its most fundamental prescriptions sound basic, even

somewhat banal. To be sure, the authors acknowledge that “Any attempt to discuss ways of preventing war must address very basic issues, and in so doing lays itself open to accusations of mushy idealism” (pp. 214–15). In *War No More* the authors opt to err in the direction of moral truisms as a small price to pay if there is a chance of contributing to a discussion eventually compelling the world’s political leaders to heed such moral considerations. In the prevention of conflict, “Often the success of such efforts may be unknown to the wider world just because the criterion of success is simply that nothing happens” (p. 198).

Hinde and Rotblat urge their readers to understand the absolute need to abolish war if humanity is to endure in this nuclear age. Their position is that “the very possession of nuclear weapons is immoral. Their enormous destructive power, inflicted on civilians even more than on the military, would make their use unforgiveable” (p. 139). The authors expressly credit Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein with having taken the initiative for international action on this front (p. 189). And as was the view of Russell and Einstein 50 years earlier, Hinde and Rotblat proclaim in their book that “The only solution is international agreement on the total abolition of nuclear weapons” (p. 139).

Hinde and Rotblat concede the ease with which people can be pessimistic about the prospects of abolishing war. However, the formidable challenge posed by such a task is deemed “no excuse for inaction”. They cite historic instances in which humanity has overcome the apparently impossible, and they stress the urgency both of identifying war’s causes (with a view to eliminating them) and of developing alternative means of resolving conflicts. Not only weapons of mass destruction but even conventional weapons of war are continually becoming more devastating. And the current state of technology renders wars much less feasible to contain or isolate.

There is discussion of how war comes in various forms and can elude exact definition. Wars’ causes, as a result, are no less diverse and difficult to pinpoint. In any case, Hinde and Rotblat are of the view that there is no scientific basis for concluding that war is an inevitable part of human societies.

Of course, the common denominator to all wars is the availability of weaponry. For centuries, societies have formulated their foreign policy in light of the Roman dictum, “If you want peace, prepare for war.” However, as Russell warned the world in 1916, “when the means of offence exist, even though their original purpose may have been defensive, the temptation to use them is likely, sooner or later, to prove overwhelming” (*PSR*, p. 59). Hinde and Rotblat discuss how “during the Cold War years there was a general assumption in the West—still widely accepted today—that the possession of nuclear weapons prevented a Soviet military attack. This is one of the deliberately propagated myths of the Cold War. Careful studies by reputable historians from the West have found no evidence for this assertion” (p. 28). The authors also reflect on how

Thousands of these [nuclear] weapons are kept in the arsenals, presumably for deterrence purposes ... but sooner or later they will be used deliberately. There is a historical precedent for this: the reason the Allies began developing the atom bomb during the Second World War was specifically to *prevent* its use by Hitler, yet nuclear weapons were used against Japan as soon as they were made. (P. 16)

Thus the doctrine of deterrence is part of the problem rather than the solution.

The authors argue that humans are *not* essentially aggressive or war-prone, but they *are* essentially disposed to aggressive self-defence in response to warlike conditions. "Often secular ideals of patriotism and territorial rights are closely interwoven with religious ideals, so that support for the 'Just War' is derived from a mixture of the sacred and the secular" (p. 76). To be sure, religious fervour is conducive to warfare, and "Religious labels are especially dangerous in that they both legitimize war and portray it as a sacred endeavour." In addition to people's identification with religious labels come their indignation and vengeance stemming from the perceived mistreatment of their ancestors.

According to Hinde and Rotblat, people are clearly all too susceptible to political, religious, and ethnic manipulation when it comes to motivating them to support wars. Moreover, the vested interests of the military-industrial-scientific complex are geared toward anything but the prevalence of peace.

In the 1980s the nuclear physicist Edward Teller persuaded President Ronald Reagan to pursue space-based ballistic missile defence systems. The Pugwash movement criticized SDI on two counts. First, no technology is completely effective. Secondly, since anti-ballistic missiles are more expensive to manufacture than offensive missiles, a simple increase in the volume of offensive missiles could be predicted. The movement to develop such systems subsided after Reagan but was considered by the Clinton administration when the US Senate's Republican majority was championing it. With the present administration, however, the zeal for promoting such systems has been rekindled.

Hinde and Rotblat discuss how, at one time, over 40 percent of people ranked nuclear weaponry among the most crucial issues. Since the end of the Cold War, though, the percentage of people associating this urgency with nuclear weapons has plummeted to about one percent. There is a grim irony here, and the authors express their grave concern with the turn that the George W. Bush administration has caused things to take:

With the end of the Cold War, and the termination of the ideological divide between East and West, the imminent danger of a nuclear holocaust has diminished, but it has not gone away; and now it is on the rise again.

To a large extent this is a result of the policies of the only remaining superpower, the United States of America, particularly those of the George W. Bush administration....

The Iraq war of 2003 was an illustration of these developments and a portent of the shape of things to come. (P. 211)

War No More denounces as a sham the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty signed by Presidents Bush and Putin in May 2002.

The authors express their hope that increased globalization will prompt countries to adopt a more long-term view and appreciate the eventually global aftershocks of war anywhere. Both the advantages and disadvantages of science's uses have made world citizenship both an option and an obligation.

The good news is that democracies are less prone to warfare and that democracies are on the rise as a percentage of the world's political systems. The bad news is that, however necessary it can seem to retaliate against perpetrators of violent deeds, violence begets violence. Consequently it is prudent to understand the circumstances prompting terrorist activities and to focus on such factors to ameliorate what potential terrorists perceive as their afflictions.

Predictably, the authors see our salvation in an empowered and improved United Nations serving as the world's policeman. Their ideal is that armaments would be possessed by just the UN and, possibly, intra-state police forces.

The authors are under no delusions concerning the United Nations' strength, and they acknowledge that at present the UN may act as a sort of brake but it cannot force cooperation. On an optimistic note, Hinde and Rotblat reflect on how (no thanks to the United States) democratic values and respect for international law are becoming more prevalent, as is evidenced by the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and the success of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is urged that increased attention be paid to early warning signs of instability. In the wake of the Rwanda tragedy, the Carnegie Commission and the Commander of the UN Mission ascertained that an April 1994 intervention of 5,000 competent troops could have prevented much of the slaughter. However, the Organization for African Unity, NATO, and NATO's individual members were unable, or unwilling, to provide the requisite numbers of troops. The book then discusses proper modes of third-party nations intervening in conflicts. Hinde and Rotblat counsel against covert interventions, such as those perpetrated by the CIA, whose furtive nature makes their conduct seem self-serving.

Finally, in a wistful vein, Hinde and Rotblat ponder how:

The threat of the extinction of the human race hangs over our heads like the Sword of Damocles. We cannot allow the miraculous products of billions of years of evolution to come to an end. We are beholden to our ancestors, to all the previous generations, for bequeathing to us the enormous cultural riches that we enjoy. It is our sacred duty to pass them on to future generations. The continuation of the human species must be ensured. We owe an allegiance to humanity. (P. 214)

It is indeed the supreme irony that the very intellectual achievements of humankind have provided the tools of self-destruction, in a social system ready to contemplate such destruction. (P. 217)
