

Cities and Disarmament Work in the Context of the Global Economic Crisis

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I see the current moment as one where it is very hard to figure out what to do—we are faced by overlapping, mutually reinforcing political, economic, and ecological crises. Many of our strategies for addressing their narrower causes and consequences one by one have proved wanting. It is a moment that demands critical reflection, despite the fact that the urgency of these crises seems to demand that we immediately press ahead on all fronts.

Against this background, I want to look back at a couple of campaigns—one national and unsuccessful, one local with short term successes and long term limitations—that I think illustrate some of the challenges we face, and some of the problems with prevailing strategies. The first is the campaign to stop the US-India nuclear deal, part of a complex of events which reveals a lot about the place of nuclear power and its associated institutions in the global order of things. The second is the successful effort by a Coalition of San Francisco Bay Area groups to stop the homeporting of a number of nuclear cruise missile armed ships and to build new Navy bases during the 1980's— a success which looks somewhat different in retrospect.

But first for context I want to provide an overview of nuclear weapons issues and the current wave of elite enthusiasm for disarmament in the context of the continuing global economic, ecological, and resource crises.

Almost two decades after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. deploys a force of nuclear weapons numbering in the thousands, on delivery systems originally designed to destroy as much as possible of Russia's nuclear arsenal before it could get off the ground. The U.S. has about 5000 nuclear weapons in its stockpile, about 2700 of them deployed. Thousands more that have been withdrawn from service have yet to be dismantled. Russia has an arsenal of roughly the same size, but both countries are committed under the Moscow Treaty, reached early in the Bush administration, to reaching a limit of 2200 deployed strategic weapons by 2012. The US is believed to have reached that limit already.

The relatively "small" nuclear arsenals of China, England, France, and Israel number in the low hundreds. India and Pakistan each have tens of atomic weapons. North Korea may have a small number of nuclear explosive devices--less than ten. It is virtually certain that none can be delivered by a missile.

What do these numbers really mean?

We learned--or should have learned--from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the nuclear destruction of even a single city remains a horror that defies human comprehension. General George Lee Butler, retired commander of U.S. Strategic Command,

calculated that “twenty weapons would suffice to destroy the twelve largest Russian cities with a total population of twenty-five million people—one-sixth of the entire Russian population...”¹

According to current estimates, a single U.S. Trident submarine now carries 96 nuclear warheads. There are two types of warheads for submarine-launched missiles, one about six or seven times as powerful as the Hiroshima bomb, the other about thirty times as powerful. Two of the 14 Trident submarines the U.S. has today would carry enough warheads to hit every city and town in the U.S. with a population over about 130,000. There would be a nuclear warhead not only for New York, Seattle, and Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Houston, but for medium size cities like Albuquerque, and smaller communities like Madison, Boise, Des Moines, and Eugene.

It is against this background that we must evaluate the meaning of the recent spate of elite disarmament proposals, including the recent agreement for negotiation of a successor to the START treaty.

The Joint Understanding for the START Follow-on Treaty signed by Presidents Obama and Medvedev this past summer commits the United States and Russia to reducing deployed strategic warheads to no more than 1675--seven years from the time the treaty is signed. The treaty as now envisioned would have little real effect on current nuclear weapons deployments. It also would not limit several thousand additional nuclear weapons each country keeps in various other accounting categories-- tactical nuclear weapons (most more destructive than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki), and weapons designated as spares and reserves, likely leaving both countries with thousands of nuclear weapons for many years to come.

There is some talk about negotiating a further agreement to reduce arsenals to 1000 or so weapons without much specificity as to what that really means, but this already appears to be a goal consigned to an even more distant future. A thousand nuclear weapons are enough to destroy the largest country, and quite likely much of the biosphere along with it. And when thinking about these numbers, it is essential to remember that the nuclear weapons establishment and their allies in Congress already are battling to assure that if the numbers of nuclear weapons deployed is reduced, the capacity to build additional warheads should the U.S. decide to do so will be strengthened.

The flurry of elite disarmament proposals we have seen over the last year and a half from various retired members of Western national security elites, such as Henry Kissinger and George Schultz, have two common themes. One is that getting rid of nuclear weapons is a laudable but distant goal. The other is that the United States will have to keep quite a lot of them around as long as anyone has nuclear weapons to assure adequate “deterrence.” President Obama’s proposals are no different. He describes actual elimination of nuclear weapons as a goal that

¹ General George Lee Butler, Speech at the University of Pittsburgh, May 13, 1999.

“will not be reached quickly -- perhaps not in my lifetime.” And the White House web site states that “Obama and Biden will always maintain a strong deterrent as long as nuclear weapons exist.”

Now step back a bit, and consider what the persistence of these immensely destructive nuclear arsenals mean in the current historical moment, as opposed to the Cold War period.

The global scene in some ways resembles that which brought the devastating world wars of the century past. The corporate capitalist system the U.S. has worked to expand and continues to defend now extends to virtually the entire planet. But new economic and military powers are emerging, seeking an increased share of the means needed to create wealth for their elites and to raise the standard of living for the rest of their populations sufficiently to avoid unrest. Older powers are determined to hold on to advantages acquired through centuries of war, conquest, and hard-driving forms of technological and economic development that have enabled them to accumulate great economic and military power, but also have rapidly depleted the resources they directly control. The United States, while still enormously powerful, is on the downslope, a debtor nation dependent on imported resources that has seen much of its manufacturing capacity slip away at the moment of its greatest military ascendance.

In the past, transitions of this kind have brought wars. These wars, like the economic system that in large part drives them, have become more intense, more total, with both the terrain contested and the energies unleashed encompassing more and more at each turn.

Today, there is no visible alternative on the horizon to global competition among state-centered or regional aggregations of capital. All states with significant power are controlled by elites who are either ideologically committed to or at the very least seem unable to offer any alternative to the immense power and inertia of the global capitalist system. Over all looms the United States, its rulers self-consciously committed to preserving this system, and possessing a military machine unparalleled in human history.

The military pre-eminence of the country with the largest economy in any given period is not surprising. And an economic system that has unleashed great industrial capacity confers military advantages on the wealthiest states. But there are particularly dangerous new aspects in the current conjuncture. The integrated complex of large-scale science, the military, and high-tech industrial capacity possessed by the United States will take a long time to match. In addition, nuclear weapons now make it possible for an incumbent “great power” to destroy an adversary entirely, and perhaps itself along with it. And even lesser wars in which nuclear weapons are used risk catastrophe that defies comprehension.

All of this makes it appear possible for a declining but still dominant global power to sustain a status quo favorable to its interests for far longer than its economic capacity might otherwise allow. And great danger can come from its elites believing that they can do so, whether it is true or not.

At the same time, global human society is fast approaching resource and ecological limits. While perhaps in principle surmountable by technology and changes in social organization, addressing these problems would require an unprecedented degree of cooperation, democracy, and shared sacrifice both within and among states. The potential for conflict over oil alone is self-evident, shaping the foreign policies and military deployments of the most powerful states over decades and constituting a significant driver for wars large and small, from Iraq to the Sudan.

With the world quite possibly in the early phases of an economic and political crisis of a magnitude and kind unseen since the 1930's, those in power may be willing to roll the dice in ways that were unimaginable during the Cold War.

U.S. elites apparently have decided to exploit what they see as structural advantages conferred by its immense military establishment to extend U.S. dominance for as long as possible. And it should be emphasized that this is not just about the policies of the Bush administration. There is little questioning in the upper echelons of U.S. political elites in either party of the need to maintain global military dominance, and of the right of the United States to use force to further its vision of global "order."

So far, aside from gentler atmospherics, there is not much sign of a major course change from the Obama administration. It has announced plans to expand the size of the military, and has intensified the war in Afghanistan (now extending into Pakistan). The Obama military budget differs only in the details from the Bush Administration budget, continuing military spending that already is almost as large as that of the rest of the world combined--and far larger than any imaginable combination of adversaries.

It now appears virtually certain that the administration will propose tens of billions of dollars in additional war funding this year, to pay for likely increases in troop levels in Afghanistan. This will bring the designated war funding portion alone of the military budget to almost twice the annual cost of the health care reforms currently being proposed. And despite a change in the party holding the majority, Congress is continuing entrenched patterns, with powerful committee members in many instances seeking to restore military appropriations in the few areas that the Obama administration has made cuts, and to protect powerful military industrial complex institutions with which they have close ties.

Ironically, the upcoming arms control negotiations with Russia over START, together with renewed efforts to achieve ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban, are likely to become opportunities for the nuclear weapons establishment to bargain for more facilities and funding guaranties for nuclear weapons for many years to come. We already are seeing signs of this, with powerful senior congress members and senators from both parties maneuvering to place language in this year's defense bills to give the nuclear weapons laboratories more voice in policy decisions for maintaining the nuclear stockpile, and to firmly establish long-range plans for modernization of both nuclear weapons and the facilities to make them. In general, we are seeing little positive from the Obama administration so far on war and peace issues besides

vague disarmament promises and toned down rhetoric. We might do well to remember Joseph Schumpeter's observation that "the budget is the skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies."²

Here in the U.S., professional arms control elements dominate public discourse of arms control and disarmament. Their approach implicitly assumes that the leading nuclear weapons states will keep civilization-destroying nuclear arsenals numbering in the hundreds or thousands and the institutions to sustain them for a very long time—many decades. Elimination of nuclear weapons is framed largely as an aspirational goal for a distant future. The timeline for nuclear disarmament, to the extent that there is one, is very, very, long.

At the same time, the global political and economic system is characterized by the interplay of strong forces that make war more likely, including wars involving one or more countries that have nuclear weapons. The potential for the kinds of crisis that in the past brought a significant danger of conflict and war among major powers seems to me to be on a much shorter time line—perhaps years, at most a decade or two. Yet many who work in the arms control and disarmament field here in the U.S. behave as if wars among the major nuclear armed-states are virtually unimaginable, a far more manageable "nuclear danger" than that posed by nuclear weapons that don't yet exist—nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran, or of "terrorists."

I believe this is due in part to a fundamental contradiction at the core of much "disarmament" thought—many proclaim that nuclear weapons are "useless," but at the same time implicitly seem to believe that "deterrence" works, at least among major nuclear-armed states. But it also is due to the fact that that sustained analysis of why major nuclear armed-states might come to blows in a post-Cold War, thoroughly capitalist world is strangely scarce in arms control and disarmament debate. No one really seems to want to think about how likely nuclear war might be if we reach the point where the ruling elites of nuclear-armed states are facing levels of material competition abroad and socio-economic discontent at home at levels not experienced for generations—since before the nuclear age began. More and more, this period brings to mind historian Eric Hobsbawm's characterization of the years before WWI:

"...[W]hat gave the period its peculiar tone and savour was that the coming cataclysms were both expected, misunderstood and disbelieved. World war would come, but nobody, even the best of the prophets, really understood the kind of war it would be. And when the world finally stood on the brink, the decision-makers rushed towards the abyss in utter disbelief."³

² Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1954. "The Economic Crisis of the Tax State." *International Economic Papers*, 4; reprinted in Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1991. *The Economics and Sociology of Capitalism*, Richard Swedberg, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press): pp. 99-140. Brought to my attention by Michael Perelman in his *Unsettling Economics* blog, <http://michaelperelman.wordpress.com/2009/10/19/capitalism-as-an-infectious-disease/>

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, (Vintage Books, New York: 1989), p.10.

The US India deal provided us with a particularly striking example of the current limitations of dominant forms of disarmament work in the U.S.

The deal was opposed by disarmament groups here almost entirely on nuclear nonproliferation grounds. The agreement allows India full access to trade in nuclear fuel and technology, despite the fact that it has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Access to international sources of nuclear reactor fuel will allow India to devote its scarce domestic uranium supply to expanding its nuclear arsenal. And it is a further example of the United States, which has ignored its own obligations under the non-proliferation treaty to negotiate for the elimination of its nuclear arsenal, claiming to right to decide who should and should not have access to nuclear technology.

These are all important arguments, but the deal also has important implications for choices in energy technology, and for the future development path of the global economy in general. Understanding and discussing these broader implications could have provided a useful educational moment and a chance to build broader coalitions--but it was an opportunity that was largely ignored by most peace, arms control, and disarmament groups.

The Senate debates and votes on the financial industry bailout and US-India nuclear deal took place on the same day last fall. These votes illustrated the power of immense interests to easily crush the single issue progressive groups on all but small things in business as usual politics, and even to override massive short term outpourings of public sentiment. They show that it will take far more organized social power than we now have to make real change.

It should be noted that the Washington, D.C.-based arms control and disarmament groups did an excellent job of documenting and publicizing the likely impacts of the deal on the global non-proliferation regime. They provided information that was in-depth, accurate, and timely, and had considerable success getting that information into first-rank mainstream media outlets. Their talking points appear to have been taken up by the few legislators who actively opposed the deal in both the House and the Senate. Nonetheless, the vote tally in the Senate was not much different from two years before, when it approved the Hyde Act in which Congress initially authorized the executive branch to finalize the deal.

The narrow focus on the deal's proliferation impacts did not address all the other forces lined up in favor of the deal it, and did not construct any narrative, or provide any analysis, that would mobilize broader attention, interest, and opposition. The battle over the nuclear deal went on for three years, without any attempt to make broader connections by the deal's more visible opponents. Thus the deal could be jammed through, basically under cover of the bank bailout, with very little attention because of the gravity of the financial crisis.

I want to provide now a quick sketch of the kind of arguments that might have been made--but for the most part were not. The US-India nuclear deal is part of a far larger set of changes in the U.S.-India relationship that elites in both countries are seeking, each with an eye to maximizing their own wealth and power. The 2006 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review

declared that "India is emerging as a great power and a key strategic partner."⁴ U.S. Military planners envision India as a possible forward base for operations from South Asia to the Middle East, and perhaps as a junior partner in those operations as well. Arms makers see huge potential profit from increased arms sales, with India being one of the world's largest importers of high-tech weapons. U.S.-based multinationals are gearing up for expansion into India, hoping to use the enhanced "security" partnership as a wedge to further open India to foreign investment and sales, not only in nuclear technology and services but in everything from food and agriculture to banking and finance to big box retail stores.

The ambitions of elites in the two countries to strengthen an array of military and economic ties is reflected in the set of initiatives announced by U.S. President Bush And India's Prime Minister Singh in July 2005 together with the agreement in principle on nuclear trade and cooperation. A few weeks earlier, the two countries had agreed to a "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship." The "New Framework" called for increased military cooperation across a wide range of activities, from joint exercises and intelligence exchanges to increased weapons trade to collaboration in missile defense development.

The July 2005 agreements also established a "CEO Forum" to "harness private sector energy and ideas to deepen the bilateral economic relationship," an agreement for closer cooperation in space technology and commercial space activities and a "Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture." The U.S. private sector members of the Agricultural Knowledge Initiative governing board are Archer Daniels Midland, a diversified giant that takes agricultural products from the world over and turns them into commodities ranging from processed foods to biofuels and industrial chemicals, biotech giant Monsanto, and Walmart, the world's biggest retailer.

The CEO Forum's agenda since 2005 has been a kind of wish-list for the deregulation and opening of India's economy. This includes, for example, greatly expanding the degree to which foreign banking and financial services companies can do operate in India. This position was duly echoed by the U.S. government, with a Treasury Department fact sheet stating that

"the development of the financial sector and trade in financial services will play a key role in promoting private-sector led growth and economic stability in India."

In light of the spiraling collapse of the U.S.-centered financial sector, the notion that opening India to its particular brand of radically deregulated, short-term profit-driven "financial services" will promote "economic stability" appears, to say the least, dubious.

Nonetheless, both the U.S. and Indian governments seem determined to continue along the same path. The joint statement issued during Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's July 2009 visit hailed upcoming negotiations on a Bilateral Investment Treaty, and called for a "newly configured CEO Forum" to "harness the ingenuity and entrepreneurship of the private sectors of

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (2006), p.28.

both countries.”⁵ Clinton further underscored the priority placed on strengthening connections between U.S. and Indian economic elites by making what the New York Times called “a power breakfast with bankers and billionaires” the first stop on the first visit to India by a high-ranking Obama administration official, even before meeting with her official counterparts.⁶

What kinds of connections might have been made by opponents of the US-India deal, in part by linking it to the larger package of deals of which it was the centerpiece?

As an energy source, nuclear power generation remains a poor choice for a variety of reasons beyond its inherent environmental risks and its inextricable links to nuclear weapons. Nuclear power plants require investments in large, expensive facilities that then commit a society to using that technology at its particular level of development in large quantities for long periods of time--a number of decades.

Both energy conservation measures and decentralized, alternative energy technologies like wind and solar and small scale hydro can be deployed in far smaller increments, and thus can more easily take advantage of constant improvements in technology. Renewable energy technologies also are more likely to give the hundreds of millions of people in India and elsewhere living in rural areas not served by an electric power grid a chance to move up the energy ladder, and to do so in ways that do not contribute to global warming. These technologies also create a wider variety of jobs in a broader range of social settings. Increased global trade in these technologies would accelerate their development and also encourage their adoption in the United States, where energy generation is highly centralized, inefficient, and dependent on fossil fuels.

Most of the other agreements also focus on industries that are highly concentrated, where expanded trade and economic activity are likely to intensify disparities of wealth both in the United States and India. High tech arms production, for example, in addition to contributing to further militarization of international relations in a context of growing global military tensions, creates relatively few jobs per dollar of public spending. Increased arms trade further concentrates wealth and political power in military-industrial complex sectors in both countries.

In the broader global context, nuclear power and high technology weapons are both elements in and help to sustain a global circulation of trade and investment devoted to the production of goods and services that only a fraction of the world’s population can afford to buy. Large organizations whether “public” or “private” provide services and buy and sell mainly to each other or to “consumers” who are the upper-echelon inhabitants of those same organizations, the “new classes” of technocrats, bureaucrats, managers, and professionals who constitute the modern middle class. This dynamic pushes much of the world’s population towards the margin, with luxury crops, resource extraction, and now biofuels driving hundreds of millions off the

⁵ “U.S. India Joint Statement,” U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, July 20, 2009.

⁶ Mark Landler, “Seeking Business Allies, Clinton Connects With India’s Billionaires,” *The New York Times*, (internet edition) July 19, 2009.

land into burgeoning urban slums. Yet development efforts continue to center on energy and transportation infrastructure designed to serve global supply chains for up-market consumer goods, with urban areas world-wide competing to stay or become stable nodes in the top-tier economy. The result is a world characterized by islands of great wealth in a deepening sea of poverty.

In this kind of world, weapons and military services will be a growth industry. And nuclear technology, with its potential for the ultimate in weaponry, provides one way for certain elites and sectors of the new middle classes to make themselves a profitable place within the current wave of corporate-capitalist globalization. The nuclear road provides them with privileged access to their own country's resources, a development context that can be shielded from foreign competition, and an entree to forms of trade that are seen as increasing in importance as fossil fuels diminish. The powerful tools of nationalism and "national security" secrecy both facilitate the extraction of wealth from the rest of society and prevent scrutiny of national nuclear enterprises that whether in first generation nuclear powers or post-colonial states have been rife with technical problems, corruption, and widespread, intractable environmental impacts. Nuclear technology, with its vision of near-magical, limitless power (an image its purveyors energetically promote), casts a positive aura over other big, centralized high-tech development programs that are profitable for elites, but have little or even negative value for much of the population in an ever more stratified world.

And if arms control and disarmament groups had made the connections to these aspects of the US-India agreements that are intended to cement both countries firmly to the neoliberal development path, the fact that the nuclear deal came up in Congress at a time when that development model itself was in crisis might have provided an opportunity. Other constituencies might have understood that this was an issue that touched on their concerns as well, and might have joined in opposition. But instead the Deal generally was viewed as just one more piece of Congressional business that could be jammed through under cover of the larger, and in the view of most, unconnected, financial crisis.

When we stick to the safe, supposedly pragmatic strategies and lose (as we have for the most part in recent years) we not only lose, but lose twice. If we had been making these kinds of connections throughout our work on this issue, and on other issues for the last several decades, we would have had a better chance of at least forcing real debate on what the deal meant--and if not, at least we would have gone further in advancing understanding of the relationships among nuclear weapons, nuclear power, and the nature of an unfair and unsustainable global economic order.

Now I want to turn to the campaign to stop the basing of Navy ships in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980's.

The Navy's plan was to base 17 additional combat ships plus support vessels in the Bay. Ten of the ships would have been armed with nuclear-capable cruise missiles. New Navy facilities, including those needed to load cruise missiles onto the ships, would have been built at

five locations in the region. Some of the new facilities were to be constructed at sites heavily contaminated with toxic materials from past industrial and military activity. Taken together, the projects, which also required extensive dredging and dredge spoil disposal, would have had extensive impacts on San Francisco Bay, one of the most ecologically significant estuaries on the West Coast of the Americas.

The campaign to oppose this giant project to a considerable degree overcame initial problems stemming from a single issue focus. It brought together a coalition that included disarmament groups, organizations opposing US intervention in Central America, local chapters of environmental groups like the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club, and elements of organized labor. Although few expected this opposition effort to prevail, since it began during the heart of the Reagan military buildup, it did, with the entire multi-part Navy plan being defeated after a five year struggle.

The campaign developed understanding of military toxic waste issues, an emerging issue at the time. It built new political ties, becoming part of the many, many campaigns over the years which both express and help to maintain the network of organizations and relationships that make the San Francisco Bay Area a relatively progressive place. It built some of the basis, for example, for the network that later showed support for Barbara Lee in her lone opposition at the outset to the Afghanistan War and the broad Congressional abrogation of power to the executive branch after 9/11.

But the campaign opposing Navy homeporting also had shortcomings, now apparent in retrospect. It was mainly oppositional in form, and still rooted to a large degree in traditional environmentalism. At the time it represented a step forward, focusing on source reduction—eliminating polluting, socially unnecessary activities rather than “end of the pipe” regulatory approaches. But it offered no real alternative vision for the future development of the region’s economy, which addressed the core causes of the ecological or economic crises to come. It argued for the superior economic benefits of favoring civilian development rather than military, but offered no specific civilian development model in terms of energy or transportation or the types of goods and services to be produced.

The dominant economic development forces in the Bay Area in the decades that followed arguably were not all that much better, from either a regional or global perspective. The Bay area became center for computer and internet booms--built in large part on the basis of huge previous military research and development investment in those technologies, and driven by burgeoning finance capital looking for outlets. The region became wealthier, but more economically stratified, with stark disparities in wealth and income, decaying infrastructure, and a general decline in public goods. And California as a whole over the last few decades has become a more polarized and less democratic polity, with its wealthier citizens now long accustomed to constitutionalized forms of minority rule in both tax and fiscal policy that frustrate all efforts to choose any genuinely different path.

Indian Economist Amit Bhaduri described the urban development path most commonly chosen in the world of corporate globalization:

“Mammoth projects create the impression of urban gloss, with fancy express-ways, underground metros, flyovers etc. at public cost.

We take it for granted that many of these public utilities are essential for efficiency, saving time in travelling, improving the quality of life, even for attracting investment....

Manhattan-like world-class cities are set as our goals, when 25% to 60% of the urban population lives a subhuman existence in slums. So why this bias, and whom does it benefit? It certainly benefits the urban elite population, and leads to uncontrolled urbanization and mega cities with growing hunger for energy, water and other resources. Slums are cleared without providing resettlement options, poverty banished only from sight.”⁷

Bhaduri was talking about India, but his description should have a familiar ring for Americans as well. Here too, politicians compete to build types of public transit and transport gateways that mainly meet the needs of the globalized new classes, linking suburbs to downtown office towers, elite entertainment venues and airports. They compete to shower subsidies on the enterprises that serve and coordinate the globalized supply chains of an increasingly insular top tier globalized economy that mainly benefits the wealthiest fifth of the world’s population. And they compete to attract the organizations and enterprises that design, build, and coordinate the immense military that plays a leading role in enforcing the polarized order of things that this pattern of investment and trade continues to generate.

So in the Bay Area, for example, we get extension of the main suburb to urban business and financial district rail system to the airport, but cutback after cut back to city bus services, and we get local Democratic Party politicians hailing the nuclear weapons research and design laboratories as the “crown jewel of our national science establishment,” and working ceaselessly to sustain its billion dollar-plus annual budget.

Listening to the conference speakers so far and looking at the program, I see exciting ideas for local alternatives to the current development path, for more ecologically sustainable and democratically controllable technologies for energy and transportation and food production. I see these as important and intelligent responses to some of the kinds of problems I have been talking about. These approaches both provide elements of a positive vision, and give people concrete ways to participate in realizing it.

But at the same time, I worry about problems of scale and urgency, of the disparity between the problems we face and the responses we have been able to muster so far. The

⁷ Amit Bhaduri, “Special Economic Zones,” *Seminar* #582, February 2008 a symposium on the recent economic policy initiatives http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/582/582_amit_bhaduri.htm

institutions of global corporate capitalism and militarism roll on, devastating lives and ecosystems, with high tech wars now part of their routine operation and with their routine operation creating the conditions for even more destructive wars to come. So we must be mindful of the fact that we still need to understand—and develop better strategies to confront—the immense organizations that shape and confine our everyday lives, and that have the power to destroy us all. They will neither stop what they are doing nor stand by politely while we create an alternative world.

One of the plenary speakers yesterday used Gandhi’s Salt march and his campaign for local handicraft cloth production as examples of building local economic self-reliance, without mentioning the broader political implications—and intentions—of those strategies. These campaigns had political significance that far outweighed their immediate economic effect, both illuminating and in the case of the Salt March directly confronting the nature of British colonial rule. They were not solely about economic self-reliance, any more than the lunch counter sit-ins of the civil rights movement were only about expanding the number of places available to eat. What will be our Salt March today?

I want to close with a passage written almost half a century ago by Lewis Mumford, one of the great students of cities and also one of the most trenchant and prophetic critics of nuclear weapons. His words could as well been written this morning:

“Our problem in every department is to slow down or bring to a halt the forces that now threaten us: to break into the cycle of expansion and disintegration by establishing new premises, closer to the demands of life, which will enable us to change our direction and in many areas, to make a fresh start.”⁸

⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and its Prospects*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961) p.528