

In this summer of *Oppenheimer*, the film that is, it is more important than ever that we meet to draw attention to the threat of nuclear weapons. The U.S. and its NATO allies wage a proxy war against Russia and seem willing to fight to the last Ukrainian- or nuclear armageddon - whichever comes first. Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to make enemies- instead of allies- with China. All of this to protect the interests of the fossil fuel industry & wall street and to make the military-industrial complex filthy rich. The doomsday clock is the closest it has been to midnight in its 76 year history.

This year marks the 78th anniversary of the only military use of nuclear weapons in history. Criticizing war and promoting peace does not impugn the bravery or sacrifice of those who fought in WWII. It does not equate what the Allies did to what the Axis did. The holocaust and the militarism of the Axis was worse than what the Allies did to stop them.

However, this anniversary should make us question the war machine. Germany and Japan should have been stopped before the war became a necessity because war leads to things like atomic bombs- which led to tens of thousands of thermonuclear bombs- each one 80 times stronger than those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki -spread throughout the planet in the hands of many countries today.

Tonight we gather to remember the tens of thousands of lives lost or ruined- most of whom were civilian non-combatants and most of which were women and children. We gather because we believe all humanity must remember this event so that it will never be repeated. We believe all life is sacred whether it be Japanese or American, Russian or Ukrainian. The "logic" of war made the use of the atom bomb a valid, rational question that we are still debating today. So we also gather to point out that war leads to things that, during any other time, would be considered completely immoral by any sane person.

I would like to read some excerpts from John Hersey's 1946 account "Hiroshima"- the book that helped make people aware of why the use of such weapons should be avoided at all costs...

...depressing stuff. But there is hope...

While the US and its Nato allies have been pushing us toward nuclear war, the rest of the world has been trying to prevent it through the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Developed by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), a coalition of non-governmental organizations all over the world, 122 countries voted to adopt the Treaty at the UN in July 2017. The TPNW entered into force after the 50th nation ratified the Treaty (making it the law in their land), on January 22, 2021.

The TPNW has been signed by 92 nations and ratified by 68. Another 44 nations have voted to approve the Treaty. Altogether 70% of the nations on earth support the TPNW.

At least 73% of Americans support nuclear disarmament. More than 50 elected officials, including 11 members of congress, 71 cities/towns, 5 US counties and 5 US states have signed resolutions supporting the TPNW, including Ithaca, Lansing, NYC, and Syracuse in New York State.

The TPNW places nuclear weapons where they should be: in the same category as chemical and biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions, all banned by international treaty. It makes it illegal to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess, stockpile, transfer, receive, use or even threaten to use nuclear weapons.

There are 13,000 warheads worldwide, with the US and Russia- now in a proxy war with each other may I remind you -holding the vast majority of warheads, with almost 2,000 on hair trigger alert. The US is committed to upgrading and enhancing its entire nuclear arsenal. In 2022, Congress increased Pentagon spending by 8 percent bringing the Pentagon's total budget to \$858 BILLION- far more than the rest of the world **combined**.

A single nuclear bomb detonated over a large city could kill millions of people. Less than one percent of the nuclear weapons in the world could disrupt the global climate and threaten as many as two billion people with starvation in a nuclear famine. The thousands of nuclear weapons possessed by the US and Russia could bring about a nuclear winter, destroying the essential ecosystems on which all life depends.

So today, and always, we need to remember the infants and toddlers and children who burned to death, whose flesh melted on their bodies and who died of horrible radiation poisoning and cancers. We need to remember because babies and kids die during every war, big and small, including our proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. So war should be prevented and nuclear war, which could destroy humanity, must never be risked. That is the purpose of organizations such as Veterans for Peace and the Genesee Valley Citizens for Peace.