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No to War with North Korea over Nuclear Weapons!

Ron Tabor

July 28, 2017

I detest nuclear weapons and believe they should be abolished as soon as possible. They seem to me to epitomize the worst aspects of modern technology. Based on the wonders of contemporary scientific knowledge and technical skill, they are good for only one purpose – destruction, and on a massive scale – and have no redeeming qualities whatsoever. They cannot even be used for excavation at construction sites, since, beyond immediately killing every living thing for miles around, they would contaminate the locales with lethal radiation for decades afterward. I hope that humanity can find within itself the resources to completely abolish these monstrous implements forever, and I fully support the movement (which includes many members of the global elite) that is currently struggling to do so. I suspect, however, that such a step would require an international revolutionary transformation of human society (and human behavior).

I detest nation states and believe they should be abolished (in this case, transcended) too. They seem to me to epitomize one of the worst characteristics of human beings, the “us vs. them” tribal-

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ism that appears to be deeply engrained in our DNA. I abhor what might be called the “horizontal” aspect of state action, the division of the surface of the planet into mutually hostile territories and the “this is ours and not yours” attitude that both fuels that division and is augmented by it. As I see it, the entirety of our beautiful Earth belongs to all people, as well as to all other living creatures, who live on it, and does not deserve to be carved up into private plots, large and small. I also abhor the “vertical” aspect of states’ activity, the oppression of the vast majority of the world’s people under the control of tiny, fabulously wealthy – and fabulously greedy, cynical, self-satisfied, and dishonest – national elites.

However, I recognize that, at least for now, we live in a world made up of national states. Since I believe that the foundation of the anarchist/libertarian socialist worldview is fairness, or justice (not the formal justice of capitalist law but substantial justice, under which people’s individual circumstances and needs would be taken into consideration), I believe that all peoples – nationalities and ethnic groups – who wish to live in their own national states have the right to do so. For this reason, I fully support the right of all nations to self-determination, specifically, the right of peoples who do not currently live in their own nation-states to fight for them, and the right of people in existing nation-states whose existence or territorial integrity is threatened by more powerful states (imperialism) to defend them.

My views on this are comparable to my views on voting rights. I do not vote. I never have, and I hope I never will. Despite this, I fully support people’s struggles to gain and to defend their right to vote. I did so during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and today support the struggle to defend voting rights against all efforts (mostly coming from the Republican Party) to restrict them, via voter ID laws, gerrymandering, and similar machinations. My right not to vote can only exist and be meaningful in a system under which everybody has the right to vote. Moreover, it is not my right to coerce people into not voting by supporting or failing to oppose

It is for all these reasons that I oppose the efforts of the United States and other countries to prevent the North Korean regime from acquiring nuclear weapons and the ability to launch them. I am against sanctions, which will only hurt the long-oppressed people of that benighted country. And I am against threats of military action, which, if carried out, can result only in an unbelievable bloodbath, in both North and South Korea and possibly more broadly, e.g., Russia, China, and Japan. The reality is that, even with the United States’ overwhelming superiority of military power, there is very little the Trump administration can do to stop the North Korean state from acquiring nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles to deliver them. It would be far better (if one were to give tactical advice to the heads of imperialist states) to follow the advice of the arch-imperialist, Teddy Roosevelt: “Speak softly and carry a big stick,” in other words, periodically (and quietly) remind Kim Jong-un that, if he were to launch his weapons, he and his entire country would be obliterated.

In any case, this whole situation should be a reminder of the pressing need to do two things:

1. Abolish all nuclear weapons as soon as possible.
2. Organize for an international revolution to overthrow the global system of competing nation-states and the socio-economic system on which it is based – capitalism – and replace them with truly democratic, cooperative, and egalitarian societies, based on federalism, decentralism, and direct popular democracy.

3. (This is the implicit argument) That the states that currently possess nuclear weapons are somehow morally superior – inherently more peaceful and more rational – than those states that are now seeking to acquire, or have recently acquired, them. But a look at history should dispel this notion. The United States, Great Britain, France, and Russia were involved in two unbelievably devastating world wars, leaving aside decades of imperialist conquest and general depredation. India and Pakistan have engaged in completely fruitless armed struggles over the decades-long and still unresolved problem of Kashmir and are still at each other’s throats, while China and Russia (when they were both supposedly “Communist”) engaged in equally fruitless armed clashes over the long border between them. Not least, and without entering into the details of this issue, Israel has been, at least until recently, the most aggressive and expansionist state in the Middle East. Finally, on the level of personalities, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is by no means less rational, that is, more likely to do something stupid, than is, say, Vladimir Putin, let alone (it’s laughable even to think about this) Donald Trump. In any case, at bottom, the issue is not some abstract, clinical conception of rationality, but the dynamics of a world divided into competing nation states. In this context, it is worth remembering that, despite its claims to moral superiority and its self-arrogated “right” to prevent other states from acquiring nuclear weapons, the United States is the only country to have ever used them, and not even against military targets but against defenseless, unarmed civilians (which was and is a war crime). And this decision was not made by a madman, but by a very sane individual, namely, US president Harry S. Truman, and only after the most careful military and political (that is, rational) calculations!

the efforts of those who want to restrict, or even destroy, that right. In the same way, while I oppose the existence of national states and struggle for a world in which they would not exist, I cannot stand on the side of those who wish to suppress struggles for national liberation. Nor am I indifferent to such struggles. I fully support them, even when they are led by political forces I detest.

Thus, I support the struggles of, for example, the Palestinians and the Kurds to form nation-states of their own. I also support the struggles of such nations as Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to defend themselves against the machinations and depredations of an expansionist Russian state. By the same token, I defend such states as Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, North Korea, against US embargoes and sanctions, let alone invasions and occupations.

My support for the rights of such nations and national liberation movements does not depend on my views of the current leaders of those countries or national struggles. I do not withhold support for the struggle to defend Ukraine from Russian aggression because the current government of Ukraine is dominated by conservative nationalists. Conversely, my support for the struggle of the Kurds is not based on any notion that the leaders of the various facets of the Kurdish struggle (in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran) are somehow progressive. Politically, I oppose all these governments and all the organizations and figures leading these national struggles. They all represent either current or future elites, and I, as an anarchist, seek to overthrow them and set up truly free – democratic, cooperative, and egalitarian – societies. But I am not indifferent to the struggles of the peoples fighting for their national independence. To me, to be neutral in such struggles is, in fact, to be supporting the efforts of the more powerful states to suppress such struggles and to dismember or otherwise threaten weaker states. While defending such peoples in struggle and nations under attack, I seek to convince them that the states they aim to set up or are currently defending will not solve their problems. I work to explain to them

that the political forces leading their struggles or the governments ruling their nations are not their friends; they do not fight for their social and economic liberation but instead aim to establish or defend the rule of elites over them. While supporting such struggles, I work to convince those involved that the only way to fully win their rights and solve their problems is to overthrow all existing and would-be elites and take over the management of their societies themselves.

My conception of social justice and my resulting support for the right of all nations to self-determination means that, while I abhor nuclear weapons and seek to abolish them, as long as they do exist, that is, as long as some nations possess them, I support the right of all nations to have them. I do not advocate that all nations seek to acquire them. Quite the contrary. Aside from their purely destructive nature, I believe nuclear weapons are a waste of precious natural, technical, and human resources. They are, at bottom, very expensive and extremely dangerous symbols, good only for making blustery demonstrations about the power of the states that possess them. In fact, in today's world, nuclear weapons are, at bottom, powerless. Since more than one country possesses them, nuclear weapons can't be used. If any one nation were (heaven help us!) to launch them, that country, and all of its inhabitants, would very quickly be flattened, incinerated by other nations that have such weapons.

It is with this as background that I make clear that I support the right of North Korea (and Iran, I might add) to have nuclear weapons and the means to launch them, and I oppose the efforts – via embargoes, sanctions, or threats of military attack – of other states, particularly those who already possess them, to force them to destroy them. Either all nations have the right to have nuclear weapons or no nation should have the right to possess them. Abolish them entirely or allow all states to possess them! Currently, eight states have nuclear weapons along with the technical abilities to produce more of them: the United States, Great Britain, France,

Russia, Israel, Pakistan, India, and China. Why should these states retain a monopoly (technically, an oligopoly) of the right to have such weapons? Who or what, aside from the reality of power – the brute fact that they already have them – gives them the right to have nuclear weapons yet to deny that right to other states? As far as I can see, there are only three arguments for this stance, two explicit, one implicit:

1. That the greater the number of states that possess nuclear weapons, the greater the chance they will be used. In fact, I think the reverse argument is stronger: the more states that have nuclear weapons, the less likely they will be used, because, as I discussed, if any one state were to launch them, that country would be destroyed. In fact, the only time nuclear weapons were ever used was when one country – the United States – had them and no other country did. Once that monopoly was broken (by the Soviet Union), nuclear weapons became, and remain today, useless. Which is why they have not, in fact, been used.
2. That the greater the number of states that possess nuclear weapons, the greater the chances that “terrorist” organizations will steal them and utilize them. However, the reality is that it is extremely unlikely that terrorist organizations will ever be big enough, wealthy enough, and powerful enough to sustain the infrastructure to build, maintain, and launch such weapons. Today, the technology involved in nuclear weapons is public knowledge and has been so for decades. The problem involved in acquiring nuclear weapons is developing the ability to obtain and refine the raw materials – isotopes of Uranium and Plutonium – and to do so in sufficient quantities to make viable weapons. And such abilities are likely to be sustained only by states, not underground organizations.