



Ray Acheson: Banning the Bomb – smashing the Patriarchy

Leseprobe

„Atomwaffen sind das Symbol für Ungerechtigkeit schlechthin. Sie bringen Tod und Zerstörung mit sich, aber auch Ungleichheit und Manipulation. Sie sind das ultimative patriarchalische Instrument: die ultimative Möglichkeit der Privilegierten, ihre Macht zu erhalten,“ schreibt Ray Acheson in ihrer feminisitschen Kritik der Atombombe. Ihr aufrüttelndes Buch „Banning the Bomb – smashing the Patriarchy“ erschien 2021 und liegt hoffentlich bald in in einer deutschen Übersetzung vor.

Die Anstrengungen der Atomlobby, die Klimakrise als Argument für die „CO2-neutrale“ Atomenergie zu nutzen und diese als „nachhaltig“ einstufen zu wollen, erfordern energischen Widerspruch. Atomkraftwerke und Atombomben sind Zwillinge. Die zunehmende (atomare) Hochrüstung braucht die gefährliche, teure und langsame Atomenergie. Der [Atomwaffenverbotsvertrag](#), der im Jänner 2021 in Kraft trat und die Pläne vieler Länder, aus der Atomenergie auszusteigen, machen Mut und wirken den zerstörerischen Kräften der Atomlobby entgegen.

[> Pro und Contra Atomenergie](#)

INTRODUCTION

Nuclear weapons have a history and a legacy of anguish, pain, and suffering. From the horror experienced by people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, to the torment of Indigenous populations whose lands and waters nuclear weapons were tested upon in the ensuing decades, to the fear of the entire world held in the grip of possible nuclear annihilation, nuclear weapons have scarred our

global community. Every minute since July 1945, when the United States tested its first nuclear weapon in New Mexico, we have been living under the threat of massive nuclear violence. Nuclear weapons are designed to incinerate cities, to burn and irradiate human bodies, to destroy everything we have built and that we love. Nuclear weapons are perhaps the ultimate symbol of the extreme edge of human power and hubris—the ability to devastate the entire planet.

The potential use of nuclear weapons is never far away. Although U.S. presidential threats of unleashing “fire and fury like the world has never seen”¹ have put the specter of nuclear war back in the headlines, it was never off the table. U.S. nuclear policy doctrines, as well as those of the other eight nuclear-armed states—China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and the United Kingdom—all envision the possible use of nuclear weapons.² Attempts to convince or cajole those that possess nuclear weapons to work seriously for disarmament have been unsuccessful. Although the United States and Russia dismantled thousands of warheads after the Cold War, they and the other nuclear-armed states have continued to invest billions since that period in “modernizing” and extending the lives of their nuclear arsenals.³ These countries have broken disarmament commitments they made to each other and to the rest of the world.⁴ The situation has been untenable for years, but those without nuclear weapons felt largely unable to change it—until recently.

From about 2010 to 2017, a new initiative emerged. Activism and advocacy, combined with diplomatic action on the international stage, achieved a renewed discourse on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons, and then a legal ban on the bomb. On 7 July 2017 at the United Nations, 122 governments voted for adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which outlaws the development, testing, production, manufacture, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, stationing, deployment, transfer, use, or threat of use of nuclear weapons, or assisting with any of these prohibited activities. You cannot do anything with nuclear weapons under this treaty—except get rid of them. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the coalition of activist groups that helped achieve this treaty, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December that year.⁵

You might not have heard about the ban, though media did cover it at the time—albeit sparsely, and with skepticism. The skepticism was greatly encouraged by the countries that possess nuclear weapons. Those countries did not participate in the negotiations. Nor did the countries that claim security from U.S. nuclear weapons—countries that rely on the fantasy of “nuclear deterrence” for their perceived protection (those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as Australia, Japan, and South Korea).

Meanwhile, the governments supporting the ban were largely those of the global south. Most of the countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Southeast Asia participated actively in this initiative. A cross-regional “core group” of countries, consisting of Austria, Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, Nigeria, and South Africa, together with a number of others such as Costa Rica, Jamaica, New Zealand, and Thailand, drove the process forward despite the opposition to it. They were compelled to do so by a simple logic, one that seems lost to policy makers in nuclear-armed states: nuclear weapons have catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences and must never be used again. The only way to ensure that they are never used again is to eliminate them.

These countries were not driven just by logic, however. Each had, to varying degrees, norms related to multilateralism and to humanitarian disarmament embedded in their national or governmental identities. Most of these countries had led in other disarmament processes, had been strong advocates for the treaties banning landmines and cluster munitions, and had strongly opposed nuclear weapons throughout the atomic age. A few did not have such a history but did have a number of dedicated people operating within their government systems that inspired deeper engagement and even leadership when it came to the nuclear ban.

THIS STORY

The story of banning the bomb belongs to these diplomats, along with activists who brought a legacy of protest and a vision for an alternative future to the international table. This is, ultimately, a story of resistance and of movement building. It is a story of activists from around the world working with diplomats in nuclear weapon-free countries to say, “¡Ya basta!” enough is enough, to the nuclear-armed governments. But this movement did not just reject what the nuclear-armed were offering. It consciously, creatively, and collectively sought to build something new—to generate and promote ideas, arguments, and frameworks that would disrupt mainstream myths and narratives, institute new international norms and laws, and ultimately put in place key mechanisms for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

This is a story about human processes as much as political processes. It is a story about how individual people came together, across borders, occupations, experiences, and identities, to challenge power. In order to do so, they had to work within international and domestic institutions and processes, and in some cases, had to resist and overcome inertia, working to achieve change from without and within, and to adapt these institutions to ensure their resilience against pressure. This meant building up trust among the individuals involved, diplomats and activists alike. It meant building a sense of capacity among those who had to convince others to help change policies and positions and building a sense of hope that these efforts were not futile—that collectively we could have an impact against the interests of some of the most militarily and economically intimidating governments in the world. This is a story of changing discourses and ideas, changing conceptions of what is credible, possible, and from where power or change can be derived.

This particular version of this story is written by an activist within one of the partner organizations of ICAN. I represented my organization, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), on ICAN’s International Steering Group. WILPF is an anti-war feminist peace organization, founded in 1915 during World War I by women from around the world. ICAN’s international steering group is the policy-making body of the campaign. It is made up of a group of ten activist organizations, and it works closely with ICAN’s staff team to lead the campaign, which in turn is made up of hundreds of other activist groups. Representing WILPF in this body gave me the opportunity to promote an intersectional feminist vision of both process and product—to bring theories and experiences of feminist and queer activists to the work of ICAN. I had been an antinuclear activist for more than a decade by the time I joined ICAN’s leadership, and this new position gave me the chance to explore and struggle with questions of movement building, diversity, and critical theories of process and change.

This book is intended to offer a firsthand account of how the treaty banning nuclear weapons came to be. This is not necessarily the only story that can be told about this process. It is not a definitive historical account of antinuclear activism; it is not even a definitive account of ICAN. Many people were involved in the process to ban the bomb, and none of us has a completely comprehensive view of it all. It is, however, a story from a feminist, antimilitarist disarmament advocate who worked on this particular project with others over many years—activists, diplomats, academics, and others at the United Nations and in capitals around the world.

Despite the admirable work of many people, this is a story told without individual attribution. This is in large part because the diplomats who were part of this process cannot, for internal governmental purposes, be identified. Although not attributing responsibility to individual diplomats is in many ways a shame—as they should be recognized for their commitment and passion to solving the problem of nuclear weapons—it also is an opportunity to write a story about collective action rather than individual achievements. Without being able to attribute responsibility or credit to individual diplomats, it seemed unjust to do it for activists. Therefore, no individuals are identified in this story, except where this book quotes from work they have published in the public domain.

This is a story about all of these people, from different experiences, countries, and stations, working together to make a change against all odds. It is an example of what international or transnational activism can achieve. This campaign took resources—human and financial—and so I certainly do not mean to suggest that this is a simple or unprivileged undertaking. But it does offer a glimpse of how activists can build a campaign in coordination with governmental allies who give a damn, and how such a campaign can gain traction over time with relentless work that mostly does not offer much in the way of publicity or recognition.

This story is one of passion and creativity. In this work, we faced many challenges—some internal to ICAN as an activist collective, some in relation to the broader antinuclear movement, and some with the powerful governments that we confronted through our actions. ICAN was not a perfect campaign, nor is it a monolith of thought and perspective. We struggled with each other, with issues of diversity, class, access, power, and ego, with some of the age-old challenges of organizing and activism. These struggles are described in this book—but so are the joys, victories, and camaraderie that come with any good activist campaign. We didn't always know what we were doing; sometimes we did the wrong thing—as individuals or as a collective—but at the end of the day we built something together, not just among ourselves but with a cadre of diplomats, government officials, and others who were just as keen as we were to change the world. This story, hopefully, should demonstrate how, as a group of people, we worked to reinvigorate a social movement, and how it may be possible to shake things up, disrupt the status quo, and make meaningful change in a world that can feel oppressive and overwhelming in its slavishness to the militaristic capitalist order.

It is a story of disrupting dominant narratives about nuclear weapons and positing alternatives in return. This process draws on the experiences of survivors of nuclear weapon use, testing, and development, using their lived reality, rather than myths of “deterrence doctrine” and “strategic security,” as the basis for action. It's a story that learns from those who have fought against privilege and patriarchy—feminist, queer, Indigenous, antiracist, and environmental activists—in order to strategically and effectively undermine traditional frameworks of security and power and offer a picture of another world in which humanitarian principles and human rights are the guiding norms for government policies, rather than violence and domination. It's a story about experiencing and, for the most part, overcoming fierce pushback from those who want to maintain the status quo, including political pressure and economic threats.

Ultimately, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a feat of collective action by people who came together to do something that had not been tried before. Like anything that people create, it has its imperfections. It has not solved all problems related to nuclear weapons: as of 2020, nearly fourteen thousand still exist in the arsenals of nine governments.⁶ Tensions and threats among those countries are on the rise. Billions of dollars a year are being spent to “modernize” and extend the lifetimes of these weapons for future generations.⁷ Yet despite the investments, risks, and threats associated with nuclear weapons, the nuclear ban treaty—and the campaign to achieve it—gives a glimpse of what is possible in this world, including that it is possible to do something all of the “great powers” are trying to prevent you from doing. Resistance may take time to have an effect, but it makes a difference.

SHAPE OF THE STORY

Chapter 1 of this book provides context to the problem of nuclear weapons, dissecting the traditional security, deterrence-based narrative about nuclear weapons through the lens of alternative perspectives about the role of the bomb in international relations. It looks closely at the opposition to nuclear disarmament, examining the racist, patriarchal, and capitalist critiques of banning nuclear weapons that the nuclear-armed states and some of their supporters have employed. It exposes the ways in which those who claim security from nuclear weapons have framed their arguments, and how challenging these weapons. Dipping back into the weeds of UN processes, it examines moments when their hostile opposition to the nuclear ban actually fostered more support for this treaty—the

arrogance, racism, and patriarchy of those supporting nuclear weapons drew increasing numbers of governments toward the ban rather than pushed them away from it.

Chapter 8 walks through the actual treaty negotiations, outlining some of the challenges and successes with the process and the substance of these negotiations. It highlights contributions from activists, survivors, and others who brought key perspectives to the negotiations and discusses key points of the treaty's text.

Chapter 9 describes the process of the negotiations, looking at how deliberations were structured, who was engaged, the key challenges, the dynamics of gender and regional diversity, and how all of the various actors managed their relationships.

The conclusion then sets out where we go from here. It reviews where humanitarian initiatives and the negotiation of the nuclear ban treaty have taken us, and where we need to take it next. It discusses the relationship of this process to other contemporary movements for social justice and offers hope for social change amid what might sometimes feel like a hopeless situation.

My hope is that this book is useful to anyone—activist, diplomat, academic, or anyone in the general public—who cares about the world and wants to work with others to change it for the better. I hope it offers some inspiration about the power of collective action against a seemingly dominant force and the importance of relentless activism even when it seems like nothing you can do will make a difference. The thing about this work, I believe, is that even if you cannot “win,” even if you believe your goal to be entirely elusive, you are required to try. Life is in the struggle, argued philosopher Albert Camus.⁸ It is our duty to work for a better world, whether or not we are sure we can achieve it. Sometimes, we even surprise ourselves.

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“TERMINALLY UNSERIOUS”

Ideologies and Oppressions of Nuclear Weapons

Banning the bomb was not an idea born in the twenty-first century. It is rooted in activist and diplomatic efforts since 1945 to confront the handful of governments that have invested billions of dollars in these objects of mass destruction and in the mythologies that are used to justify their existence. To understand how and why those of us working on this project sought a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, it is important to understand the systems of thought and practice that have sustained nuclear weapons for more than seventy years.

We have all been subjected to the power of entrenched narratives on this subject, as if discourses about “nuclear deterrence” and “strategic stability” provide the only reasonable way to think about nuclear weapons. Abolishing the bomb requires us to consider alternatives to what we have been force-fed for decades. This means approaching issues not from traditional international relations theory but by invoking and learning from feminist, queer, Indigenous, antiracist, and postcolonial perspectives, in order to expand our understanding of the realities of nuclear weapons and the possibilities for eliminating them. It means bringing the lessons of practice and process from these sites of struggle to bear on nuclear weapon policy and process in order to challenge what is normative and credible and generate a sense of capacity among those who genuinely want to achieve nuclear disarmament.

This chapter offers an explanation of why nuclear weapons have persisted for so long and the frameworks of thought and resistance that can be useful for mounting a successful challenge to these weapons. It sets up some of the analysis that will be used throughout this book to describe and explain both the substance (the why) and the process (the how) of banning nuclear weapons. And it seeks to make the case that those supporting and defending the continued existence and possession of nuclear weapons are the ones suffering from a serious lack of credibility and rationality, not those of us who want to eliminate this weapon of mass destruction.

WHAT ARE NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND WHY DO SOME GOVERNMENTS WANT THEM?

Nuclear weapons are material objects. They are composed of radioactive materials such as uranium or plutonium. They are explosive devices that use fission or fusion reactions to unleash destructive force. They are designed and built to kill people through blast, fire, and radiation. They can only be used to slaughter civilians indiscriminately, to destroy entire cities, to disrupt economies and societies, and—if multiple such weapons are used—to exacerbate climate change and cause global famine. If enough were used at one time, they would obliterate the planet.

But nuclear weapons are not treated in the mainstream, “credible” discourse as weapons of massive violence. Instead, they are treated, especially by those governments that possess them, as objects that deter conflict, preserve peace, and ensure security and stability. According to this discourse, nuclear weapons are meant not to be used but to act as a “deterrent” to other countries that might seek to wage a war or use a nuclear weapon. In the 1960s, Thomas Schelling argued that military strategy should be based on the ability to coerce, intimidate, and deter.¹ From this developed the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD): the supposition that if each party’s nuclear forces are sufficient to destroy the other’s, then neither would dare to use nuclear weapons.² “War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength.” So goes the slogan of The Party in George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.³ “Nuclear weapons prevent war.” So goes the “realist” discourse in academia and international politics. Kenneth Waltz famously argued in favor of the spread of nuclear weapons, saying, “more may be better.”⁴ As feminist scholar Carol Cohn found in the 1980s, “defense intellectuals” built their careers formulating systems to explain “the necessity of having nuclear destructive capability” and “why it is not safe to live without nuclear weapons.”⁵ They insist on talking about nuclear weapons in the abstract, as magical tools that keep us safe and maintain stability in the world. Cohn describes the “elaborate use of abstraction and euphemism” that refused to “touch the realities of nuclear holocaust that lay behind the words,” including terms such as clean bombs, damage limitation weapons, and surgically clean strikes.⁶ From the perspective of those deploying this language and constructing theories of nuclear strategy and deterrence, nuclear disarmament is not realistic or rational—it would undermine “strategic stability,” put the world at risk of war with conventional weapons, and undermine the national security of the countries “giving up” the bomb.

All of the nuclear-armed states share this perspective and discourse. They do not see nuclear weapons as inherently unacceptable, as the UK government has said openly, arguing that nuclear weapons “have helped to guarantee our security, and that of all allies, for decades.”⁷ The United Kingdom does not even refer to its nuclear weapons as weapons at all—they call them their “nuclear deterrents.” France does this, too, and argues, “Since it may only be used in extreme circumstances of self-defense, the French deterrent does not violate international law in any way.”⁸ The United States claims to protect many countries with its nuclear weapons—those that are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as Australia, Japan, and South Korea. India and Pakistan claim they need nuclear weapons to prevent each other from attacking. North Korea says it has acquired nuclear weapons to prevent invasion and occupation by the United States.

These governments all claim nuclear weapons are necessary for their national security. They argue that complete nuclear disarmament is not possible or rational. The United Kingdom, for example, says, “We do not yet have the right political and security conditions for those without nuclear weapons to feel no need to acquire them, nor for those who do have them to no longer feel the need to keep them. Nor is it possible to identify a timeframe for those conditions.”⁹ The U.S. government even has an official tagline for this position: Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament. It demands a focus on “the underlying security concerns that led to their [nuclear weapons] production in the first place”—as if nuclear weapons were created by some higher being and bestowed upon certain chosen governments, rather than having been created by the United States first and foremost to incinerate civilians during World War II. In advocating for the creation of this “environment,” the U.S. government has asserted that every commitment it has made since the

dawn of the atomic age is “from a different time and a different security environment than we currently face” and thus “to make progress we need to look forward, not backwards—we must not fixate on historical language that is out of date and out of step with the current prevailing security environment.”¹⁰

Although the U.S. government posits this approach as new and innovative, this is, in fact, an age-old argument. In 1956, then-UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld had to refute this type of rhetoric. “On the one hand . . . disarmament is not likely to come about in an efficient, effective way short of further improvement in the international situation,” he acknowledged. “On the other hand, I do not think any single policy move will contribute more to an improvement in the international atmosphere than an agreement on even the most modest step in the direction of disarmament.”¹¹ Yet nuclear-armed states continue to rely on this premise to delay disarmament indefinitely. The United States’ focus on creating an “environment” conducive to nuclear disarmament is not about what the United States can do for nuclear disarmament but what the rest of the world can do for the United States in order to make it, as the most heavily militarized country in the world, feel “safer.”

The U.S. government is not alone in staking out this position. Russia has said that those calling for immediate progress on nuclear disarmament are “radical dreamers” who have “shot off to some other planet or outer space.”¹² Officials of all of the nuclear-armed states have said, in various ways, that those desiring disarmament do not understand how to protect their people, that their security interests do not matter, or do not exist at all. Initiatives toward nuclear abolition are illegitimate, naive, or, my personal favorite, “terminally unserious.”¹³

But who, really, is terminally unserious about nuclear weapons? Those who believe we can live with the atomic bomb forever without incident, or those who see their continued possession and proliferation as a catastrophe waiting to happen—and as a catastrophe that has already happened?

WHY DO OTHERS REJECT NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

The majority of states, international organizations, and activist groups have articulated clearly that nuclear weapons do not provide security and that the consequences of their use are wholly unacceptable. They argue that the theory of nuclear deterrence is dangerous. Asserting that nuclear weapons are good for some is the same as arguing that they are good for all, as an Irish ambassador once said.¹⁴ They either provide security, or they don’t. Their consequences are either acceptable or unacceptable. It is illogical to claim that nuclear weapons are legitimate tools of security for some states but not for others.

Claims about the necessity of “creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament” ensure that actual disarmament is perpetually punted down the road to some unknown, possibly unattainable future state of affairs in which the world is at “peace” and security is guaranteed through some other imagined means. The majority of governments consider the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons to be a key step in the pursuit of peace, global justice, and security for all. Most countries have already put this approach into practice. Some have even relinquished nuclear weapons, recognizing the insecurity they would bring to their own countries and to the world. Sweden, for example, has explained that it discontinued its nuclear weapons research and development program in the 1960s because it believed that nuclear abolition was the safest option both for its people and for the rest of the world.¹⁵

So why is there such a stark difference in the way governments and people view nuclear weapons? Why is nuclear deterrence theory treated as undeniable truth by mainstream international relations and political science scholars, particularly in the Western academy? Is this theory actually valid, or is it providing an intellectual cover for something much deeper and darker?

Some who espouse the theory cite the lack of use of nuclear weapons as an act of war since 1945 as evidence of the validity of nuclear deterrence. Others claim that nuclear weapons “ended” the

Second World War.¹⁶ However, many counterarguments can be used to damage the credibility of the theory. First, evidence exists of hundreds of near-uses of nuclear weapons.¹⁷ Second, scholars and politicians have pointed to a range of developments and factors that contributed to both the end of the Second World War and to the lack of a direct war between the United States and Soviet Union.¹⁸ The fact that so few countries have sought to obtain nuclear weapons is also a persuasive argument against the idea that nuclear deterrence provides an ultimate security guarantee: instead, it shows that most of the world's governments see nuclear deterrence as a toxic theory that puts all of us at risk.

Even inside the nuclear-armed states, opinions about the rationality of nuclear deterrence plans and policies vary widely. U.S. whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg's latest book, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, provides an inside view of what he calls the "institutionalized madness"¹⁹ of the possession of nuclear weapons and preparations for their use. Compiling evidence from his time as an analyst with the Research and Development Corporation and a consultant to the Department of Defense and the White House, Ellsberg catalogs a number of shocking policies and practices that have held the world at the brink of annihilation throughout the atomic age.

The Doomsday Machine, as Ellsberg calls the nuclear weapon complex, is "a very expensive system of men, machines, electronics, communications, institutions, plans, training, discipline, practices, and doctrine." This system, he explains, could "with unknowable but possibly high probability bring about the global destruction of civilization and of nearly all human life on earth."²⁰ He describes the seven decades of U.S. nuclear war planning as "immoral," "insane," and "a chronicle of human madness."²¹ (Note that the quotation of these terms here is not meant to perpetuate a stigma on mental health but to convey Ellsberg's argument, in his own words, that his experience and perception of the nuclear war system is of a system not based in rationality or sound judgment. It is also interesting to see these terms applied to the male-dominated sphere of nuclear war planning, as these are terms that often have gendered connotations—as will be explored later, concepts of irrationality, hysteria, and disconnection from reality are typically deployed against women to prove their incapacity or irrelevancy for political life.) Any social system, Ellsberg writes, that creates and maintains the apparatus and system to destroy the world "is in its core aspects mad."²²

It is profound to have someone so intimately familiar with the U.S. nuclear machine staking these claims against the policies and practices that he helped shape and maintain. But Ellsberg is certainly not the first to observe the problems inherent in existing nuclear weapon plans and policies. In 1976, for example, Swedish diplomat Alva Myrdal published a blistering review of the state of nuclear disarmament efforts thus far. Among her conclusions was the assertion that the nuclear arms race "is intellectually unreasonable and morally unsound."²³ The buildup of nuclear arsenals and the nuclear establishment, she argued, "has gone, and is going, right against what would be rational from the point of view of the interests of every nation. . . . It is beyond all reason."²⁴ Suggesting that "there are forces which irrationally drive the governments forward as participants in the international arms race,"²⁵ she argued that their lack of concern or attention to nuclear danger

is the result not only of our opportunistic inclination to turn our attention away from disagreeable thoughts, but also of a reckless and systematic propaganda by the vested interests and their obedient servants among politicians, governments, military and foreign policy bureaucracies, and even captive scientists. The mass media serve as megaphones for this propaganda while blacking out our knowledge of facts and rational reasoning.²⁶

Yet, there is a risk in arguing that those who design and implement the tools and policies for nuclear war are mad, that they have a psychological affliction. As Ellsberg carefully articulates, "The creation, maintenance, and political threat-use of these monstrous machines has been directed and accomplished by humans pretty much the way we think of them: more or less ordinary people, neither better nor worse than the rest of us, not monsters in either a clinical or mythic sense."²⁷

Ellsberg was not, of course, the first to make these arguments. Already in 1987, Carol Cohn's "close encounter with nuclear strategic analysis" in the United States led to illuminating (and amusing) articles in *Signs* and the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* about the discourse of those in charge of nuclear war planning.²⁸ Writing about her experience as a college teacher attending a workshop on nuclear weapons, doctrines, and arms control taught by "distinguished defense intellectuals," Cohn examines the language employed by those discussing nuclear war strategy and the indoctrination of these "likeable and admirable men" who casually and regularly "blew up the world while standing and chatting over the coffee pot."²⁹

Although Cohn's work was based on shorter-term participant observation, anthropologist Hugh Gusterson spent years conducting an ethnographic study at one of the main U.S. nuclear weapon laboratories, investigating how nuclear weapon scientists justify and even moralize their work. He found that through ritualized secrecy, institutional bonding, and disciplined emotions, those who design and build nuclear weapons become invested in the goals of their projects as necessary for national and international security. They do not wish harm upon the world, but they are socialized within the lab to conceive of the world, of power, and of security in a very particular way that enables the capacity of mass destruction to seem like a logical and even necessary choice.³⁰

Arguably, a trajectory, a road, leads throughout history to nuclear war. Building the capacity for mass destruction—and the willingness to use it—did not materialize out of thin air. Ellsberg, for example, argues that most immediately, nuclear weapon policies grew out of the justifications for bombing cities and civilians during World War II. The willingness, and even desire, to incinerate civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure as part of the war campaign resulted in the practices of firebombing and blanketing wide areas with explosive violence. This approach characterized the latter part of the war, with major civilian centers being deliberately targeted by allied forces long before Hiroshima and Nagasaki were met with the "fire and fury" of Fat Man and Little Boy. It is a disturbing story of how practices previously held abhorrent become normalized in the course of conflict—how what was once held as anathema to "civilized engagement" becomes entrenched in doctrine and strategy. This is how, according to Ellsberg's account, nuclear war policies became what they are today: plans to destroy the world.

IDEOLOGIES OF THE BOMB, OR THE ROOTS OF OUR DISCONTENT

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Ray Acheson und ihr wegweisendes Buch „Banning the Bomb – smashing the Patriarchy“

[> zu Ray Achesons Bericht](#) (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung)

[> Für ein Leben ohne Waffen!](#) – Statement der WILPF zum Internationaler Frauentag

[> Leseprobe aus Achesons Buch](#)

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