



Engendering Change in U.S. Nuclear Policy

By Diana Ohlbaum



Congress, the administration, and the nonprofit sector all recognize they need to do more to bring the voices of women and people of color into foreign policy decision-making.

Yet the field of nuclear security policy has remained largely closed to people of different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

It's not at all unusual to see hearings like the one held in late April by the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, which featured four white men unwilling to recommend a single reform to U.S. nuclear policies.

Changing who sits at the policy table is important. Democracy cannot function properly when people are excluded from the decision-making process because of their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other factors.

Outcomes are less successful when leaders fail to consider a wide variety of views and perspectives. Yet at every stage of the process, the current system manages to dismiss, disrespect, disempower, and dehumanize women and people of color.

It starts with the patriarchal and white supremacist myths that pervade American society, that some lives are more valuable than others. That we live in a world of scarcity and greed, where competition is essential and one's gain is another's loss. That violence and war may be undesirable, but necessary and effective at protecting "us" from "them." That our nation is not only fundamentally good, but better than all the others and, therefore, exempt from the rules we expect them to follow.

This is the kind of logic that justifies buying "national security" with weapons and war rather than asking how women; gender minorities; and Black, Indigenous, and people of color experience insecurity. It tells Americans that nuclear weapons make them safe, and ignores how nuclear waste, testing, and accidents continue to harm Indigenous and Native American communities in particular.

It allows Pentagon planners to develop games that envision fighting and "winning" a nuclear war without contemplating human and planetary devastation. It allows our government to invest in one person, who has thus far always been a man, the power and authority to decide whether to end life on Earth as we know it.

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Peace activists take to the streets to change the power structures in Washington, DC. FCNL photo.

“Since Hiroshima was completely enveloped in flames, we felt terribly hot and could not breathe well at all. After a while, a whirlpool of fire approached us from the south. It was like a big tornado of fire spreading over the full width of the street. Whenever the fire touched, wherever the fire touched, it burned.”



— Akiko Takakura, a hibakusha (survivor of the Hiroshima bombing) in “Voices of Hiroshima,” a 1986 documentary produced by the Hiroshima Peace Culture Center and NHK, Japan’s public radio. Ms. Takakura’s and other hibakusha accounts can be found at inicom.com/hibakusha

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Although this ideological framework is often hidden and unacknowledged, it is one that many women and people of color instinctively reject from the start. Before they embark on their careers, they are already turned off by these issues that seem so irrelevant to their own lives and so foreign to their way of thinking.

Others are intimidated by the dense and technical language of nuke-speak, which wards off newcomers with a seemingly impenetrable barrier to admission. Those who choose to enter the nuclear community find themselves blocked and buffeted by systemic racism and sexism.

Professors and administrators could do much more to recognize and nurture talent in young people who are Black or Latinx or female or gender nonconforming. Professional societies and coalitions and workplaces must take proactive steps to prevent and respond to offensive acts and speech.

Gatekeepers—the people who decide whose articles get published, which experts get invited, whose work gets promoted—need to stop turning automatically to the people they already know and the ways of thinking that feel most comfortable to them.

Bringing more women and underrepresented groups into this field is no guarantee that U.S. nuclear policy will change. But failing to do so ensures it won’t. More importantly, making the nuclear field more representative of the whole of America is an

essential part of making our society more equitable and humane.

All of us can help make this change happen. At FCNL, we are working with Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation to elevate the voices of Black, Indigenous, and women of color and to diversify the field.

Democracy cannot function properly when people are excluded from the decision-making process because of their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other factors.

As a Gender Champion in Nuclear Policy, Diane Randall has pledged to promote gender equality through FCNL public events and hiring practices. You can make a difference, too.

Share the work of a Black or Latina expert with your contacts or follow her on social media. Invite not only speakers with traditional academic qualifications, but also those with relevant life experience.

Ask your members of Congress where they get their information to make decisions on nuclear policy and suggest alternative sources. Each of these small steps can create a butterfly effect, setting in motion the fundamental transformation that is required.

Diana Ohlbaum is FCNL’s senior strategist and legislative director for foreign policy. [f](#)

Viewpoint: Finding My Voice in Washington

By Monica Montgomery

On my very first day as a Young Fellow at FCNL, I attended a lobby meeting on Capitol Hill with a senate staffer. Despite being told that I should not feel pressured to contribute much to the meeting—which I was pretty sure meant I really should not even speak—I was overwhelmed with nerves.

After nearly an hour of back and forth between my supervisor and the staffer, I was even more nervous upon realizing that one day I would be expected to speak up and eventually even lead in meetings just like this one.

I thought to myself that there was no way I would ever know enough or speak eloquently enough to be an effective lobbyist.

However, after dozens more meetings like the one on my first day, I was slowly able to build up my own expertise on Congress, nuclear policy, and the defense budget. By the end of my fellowship, I felt prepared and confident enough to apply for and accept a position at the Council for a Livable World.

I coordinate and spearhead its work to build champions in Congress for nuclear arms control and non-proliferation and a Pentagon budget that reflects real threats and cuts wasteful spending.

Since the 2020 election, our work has largely been concentrated on rolling back some of the worst policies of the Trump administration. This includes the decisions to deploy a new “low-yield” nuclear warhead, develop a new sea-launched cruise missile, and speed up nuclear modernization plans.

We are also working with Congress to build the space for the Biden administration to reinvigorate arms control and non-proliferation agreements and to make further reductions in our nuclear arsenal.

President Biden has already made major progress in these areas by extending the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia and pursuing efforts to reenter the Iran nuclear deal.



Monica Montgomery, a former FCNL Young Fellow, now works for the Council for a Livable World to build congressional champions for nuclear arms control and non-proliferation. Photo by FCNL.

However, there is so much more to be done to truly advance arms control and disarmament goals.

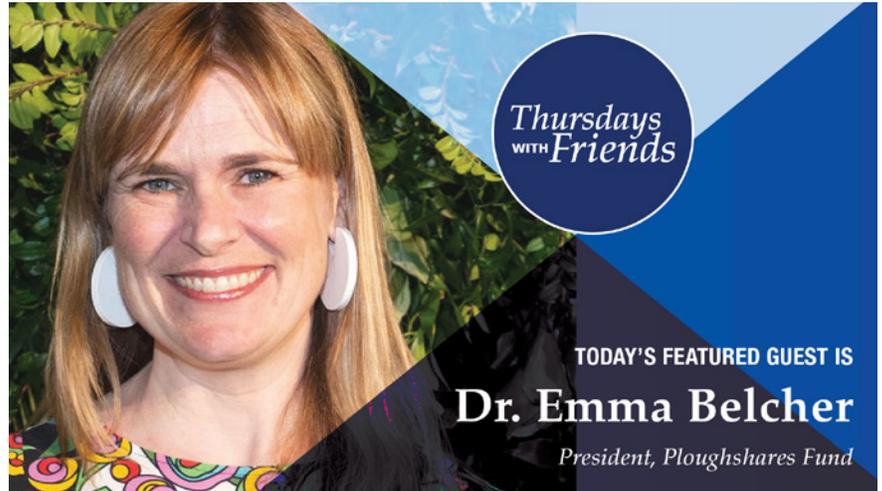
In addition to supporting diplomatic engagement and dialogue with countries like Russia, China, and North Korea, we must also pursue a disarmament agenda at home and trim the \$1.6 trillion nuclear modernization program, especially the current plans to develop and deploy costly and dangerous new nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles.

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A New Arms Race Will Not Make Us Safe, Warns Expert

When Diane Randall asked nuclear disarmament expert Dr. Emma Belcher, whether we are safe today from nuclear war, she replied: “We are safer than we were in 2019, [but] for a number of reasons, we’re still a long way from being safe.”

Dr. Belcher was Randall’s guest during a recent Thursdays with Friends to discuss humanizing nuclear security. She is currently president of Ploughshares Fund, which supports FCNL’s advocacy on nuclear disarmament.



The recording is available at www.fcnl.org/twf-belcher.

A major reason why we are safer today is because of the change in our country’s leadership. “We don’t currently have someone with control over the nuclear button ... for whom we have questions about their sense of judgment [and] stability,” Belcher said. “I think we are safer from that respect.”

However, she warned that with about 13,000 nuclear weapons in the world today, the world is still at high risk of something going catastrophically wrong. More than 90% of these weapons are in the United States and Russia.

Voices of people who have a stake in nuclear issues must be allowed into the discussions in a way that has not been done before.

“These weapons present a very real danger that we might really end up blundering into a nuclear war purely by mistake or by accident,” she said. “It could be caused by cyberattacks, misinformation, [or] unstable decision-makers.”

Although the total number of nuclear weapons has been greatly reduced, many countries, including the

United States, are planning to modernize their nuclear arsenals and increase the numbers and the types of nuclear weapons. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the United States plans to invest nearly \$2 trillion to modernize its arsenal over the next few decades.

“This is ... an extraordinary amount of money that, in my view ... does not keep us safe [but] makes things more dangerous,” Belcher said. “I’m highly concerned about this sort of new arms race that we appear to be entering into now.”

Dr. Belcher emphasized that in planning nuclear strategies and modernization, policymakers must think of what it will mean to and how it will impact the lives of everyday people.

She said that voices of people who have a stake in nuclear issues must be allowed into the discussions in a way that has not been done before.

“Human security is centering the needs of people over weapons, and centering dialogue and cooperation over threats and military responses,” she said. Belcher urged FCNL to challenge current assumptions about nuclear weapons issues, the threat of their use, and deterrence as the underlying policy.

“We need to challenge this and make sure that the nuclear policy [takes] into account what actually keeps people safe on a daily basis,” she said. 

FCNL Makes the Case to Cancel New Missiles

FCNL has begun publishing a series of papers outlining the arguments against building a new intercontinental ballistic missile force. The papers are intended to help congressional offices understand the risks and costs of the new system and to consider alternatives.

At the heart of this program is the replacement of the country's arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with a new Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD). This program is expected to cost around \$260 billion over its lifecycle.

"[Ground Based Strategic Deterrent Is a Poor Use of Tax Dollars](#)" reports that the GBSD program is "wasteful, expensive, and unnecessary." The program could cost more than nine times Operation Warp Speed, which brought us COVID-19 vaccines. If invested in meeting other needs, the overall budget for

nuclear weapons modernization can create millions of jobs. "GBSD is not a national priority and will not make Americans more secure," the paper concludes.

"[Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles Increase the Risk of Nuclear War](#)" warns that all nuclear weapons kills indiscriminately and could end life on earth. The U.S. ICBM force consists of more than 400 nuclear weapons, each one many times more powerful than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.

Since these missiles have to be launched within minutes, they are constantly kept on high alert. It leaves very little room for error, but errors have occurred. In 2018, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency took 38 minutes to correct a false alert.

"[Alternatives to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles](#)" stresses that there are alternatives to ICBMs, which

are housed in silos spread across Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska. Advances in Russian missile technology have ensured that these 50-year-old silos will not survive a massive attack.

The nature of war today has changed, and potential enemies have demonstrated cyberwarfare and supply chain attack capabilities—challenges that the ICBM arsenal was not designed to address.

"There are cheaper and more effective ways to address the real security challenges America faces without escalating nuclear risks," writes Diana Ohlbaum, FCNL senior strategist and foreign policy director, in an overview to the papers.

All three papers, intended primarily for congressional staff, can be downloaded from www.fcnl.org/gbsd. Advocates are encouraged to read these papers and share them with their members of Congress. 



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In a closely divided Congress where support for nuclear weapons runs deep, it is no question that this work, at times, can feel overly stagnant and challenging.

To continue making progress on reducing the threat posed by nuclear weapons and eventually eliminating them, it is critical for our movement to appeal to younger generations and incorporate diverse, intersectional perspectives.

Opportunities like FCNL's Young Fellows program are critical to making progress on this front. In a profession where there are very few lobbyists on our side and I am almost always the youngest and very often one of the only females in the room, it would be easy to retreat to the nerves and fear that I experienced back on my first day.

However, through my time as a Young Fellow, I was able to discover my own voice and unique role in the field. I know that without the crucial mentorship and professional development opportunities of the fellowship, I would have not had the confidence and motivation to continue in this work.

Funnily enough, I now frequently correspond and meet with—free of nerves—the same staffer that I encountered on my first day at FCNL.

Monica Montgomery was a 2019-2020 Young Fellow in FCNL's nuclear disarmament and Pentagon spending program. Today, she is a coordinator and research analyst for the Council for a Livable World and its affiliate, the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. 

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Margery Post-Abbott and Carl Abbott of Multnomah Friends Meeting in Portland, Oregon. FCNL Photo by Kate Holt.

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Contact Stephen Donahoe at stephen@fcnl.org or 202-465-7560.



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Quaker Meeting Aligns with Nuclear Treaty

By Alex Frandsen



The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), adopted in 2017 and entered into force this year, is a landmark international agreement. This pact comprehensively bans nuclear weapons, with the ultimate intention of eliminating them entirely.

There are 54 countries that have ratified the treaty. The United States, notably, is not among the signatories. From the start of negotiations, the United States made it clear that it had no interest in relinquishing its grip over nuclear power anytime soon.

For Quakers, this was a moral error with devastating repercussions. Instead of sitting by quietly, Northampton Friends Meeting in Massachusetts decided to do something about it.

In the fall of 2017, as then-clerk Marcianna Caplis recalls, Friend Timmon Wallis approached the meeting with an idea: With some work, Northampton could become the first faith community in the United States to come into compliance with the Nuclear Ban Treaty.

Almost immediately, the idea had widespread support. "It felt extremely natural," said Caplis. "We're not a nation-state, but we can still examine our own complicity with nuclear weapons. We've always said that war is not the answer, so what are we doing to make sure that we're working towards that?"

A working group was quickly formed, and opportunities for compliance quickly emerged. "We didn't want to have any involvement with businesses



Northampton Friends receive a certificate for their efforts to comply with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Photo courtesy of Northampton Friends Meeting.

that were investing in nuclear weapons, [so] we just explored everything," said Caplis.

After some investigating, the meeting found that their bank held securities in the nuclear industry. So, after extensive communications with the bank, they switched to another. Friends even dug into the technology they were using.

No step was too small. They found out, for instance, that two of their thermostats were made by Honeywell, which also makes components for nuclear weapons. So, plans were made to find new thermostats.

Northampton Friends Meeting also spread their message beyond the walls of the meetinghouse. They drafted a letter outlining their intention to come into compliance and sent it out to local faith communities in case they wanted to follow suit. They also decided to give Timmon Wallis and his wife, Vicki Elson, a traveling minute to spread the word to other meetings and formed a support group to elder their work.

On June 17, the meeting was given a physical affirmation of their efforts: NuclearBan.US, an organization committed to using the Nuclear Treaty Ban to educate and mobilize people across the United States, sent Northampton Friends Meeting a signed certificate attesting that they had come into alignment with the treaty.

For other faith communities hoping to follow in their footsteps, Caplis has the following advice: "Don't get overwhelmed with specifics. The places to look mostly are your investments, so start your quiet research there."

Caplis also emphasized that Quakers have a particularly important role to play in spreading the word of nuclear disarmament. "[Friends] are usually very restrained, and there's nothing wrong with that. But I think maybe it's time for us to not be so restrained."

"It's pretty simple," she continued. "We're not in favor of war and nuclear weapons. So, we should do everything we can to make sure we're not supporting them."

Alex Frandsen is a member of FCNL's communications team. 

Q&A: Nothing More Evil than Nuclear Weapons

With Timmon Wallis

What brought you to nuclear disarmament work?

I first got involved in nuclear disarmament work as a teenager in Northampton, MA, volunteering after school at the local American Friends Service Committee office, which was in the home of my great inspiration and mentor, Frances Crowe (Quaker peace campaigner who died last year at age 100).

It seemed at the time, and still does, that there can be nothing more evil than nuclear weapons, designed to destroy entire cities and slaughter thousands or even millions of innocent people in a single instant.

You were a key instigator in getting Northampton Meeting to become the first faith community in the United States to come into compliance with the Nuclear Ban Treaty. What inspired you?

I was very much inspired by the “We’re Still In” movement, which began the day former President Donald Trump announced he was pulling the United States out of the Paris Climate Agreement. Even if the United States was not going to be officially part of the Paris Agreement anymore, cities, states, businesses, faith communities, and individuals all across the country decided they would remain committed.

If we could sidestep the federal government on climate, why not also try to do that in relation to the Nuclear Ban Treaty?

What role can the faith community play in nuclear disarmament?

A key responsibility of faith communities is to be holding the rest of society, and especially our politicians, to the highest possible moral standards. It is the job of Quakers, in my opinion, to be holding the other faith traditions to the high moral standards they already claim to uphold.

It is a very low bar for any faith community to be saying “no” to a so-called “defense” policy that is predicated on the mass murder of civilians. But most of our politicians, as well as most of our faith leaders, are not ready to do that yet. Who else is going to take that very strong and clear moral position if Quakers do not?

What do you think are some of the most promising developments concerning nuclear disarmament?

Without a doubt, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Nuclear Ban Treaty) is the most promising development concerning nuclear disarmament since the nuclear age began more than 75 years ago. Nothing else comes close to the final and absolute rejection of these weapons by a majority of the world’s countries.

Conversely, what troubles you about the state of nuclear disarmament today?

The reluctance by so many in the U.S. peace movement and in the arms control community in Washington, DC, to understand and appreciate the significance of the Nuclear Ban Treaty and what it means for their ongoing nuclear disarmament efforts.

The waters have broken! The goalposts have moved! It is no longer useful or even relevant to be campaigning for small incremental steps in nuclear weapons policy when the rest of the world has unequivocally outlawed these weapons and is demanding their complete elimination.

Nuclear disarmament can feel like such an existential issue. How can advocates and advocacy organizations make it more accessible to the general public?

Nuclear weapons threaten everything that we care about. They threaten our children’s future just as surely as does climate change. Threatening to kill millions of people in other countries in order for Americans to somehow feel “safe” is the ultimate expression of white supremacy.

But, of course, Americans would die in vast numbers too, so the whole concept of nuclear “deterrence” is utterly stupid and insane.



Timmon Wallis recently moved to Brussels to become the director of the Quaker Council for European Affairs. He was the former director of NuclearBan.US. Interview by Alex Frandsen. 