Special Feature

Bridge-Building Between Two Morals Toward a Common Goal: Words of Popes and U.S. Presidents

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"the readiness to use nuclear weapons against other human beings – against people whom we do not know, whom we have never seen, and whose guilt or innocence it is not for us to establish – and, in doing so, to place in jeopardy the national structure upon which all civilization rests, as though the safety and the perceived interests of our own generations were more important than everything that has ever taken place or could take place in civilization: this is nothing less than a presumption, a blasphemy, an indignity – an indignity of monstrous dimensions – offered to God!"

George Kennan, *The Nuclear Delusion*, 1983: 206-7.

Introduction

On November 24, 2019, Pope Francis paid a visit to the A-bombed cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Thirty-eight years had passed since the first papal visit to the A-bombed cities, that of Pope John Paul II to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the meantime, the Cold War had ended, and it has been believed that the risk of nuclear war among the major powers has decreased, and the momentum for nuclear disarmament has gradually grown. President Barack Obama's speech on a "World Without Nuclear Weapons" in Prague in 2009 raised awareness of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons (Obama, 2009).

The norm of calling out the inhumanity of nuclear weapons came to fruition as the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017, after three international conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons held between 2012 and 2014. The TPNW was adopted at the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2017 and entered into force on January 22, 2021, after being ratified by the 50 countries in October 2020 as required for it to enter into force. In addition, President Obama became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Hiroshima in 2016. Indeed, it can be said that there is a growing movement to eliminate the existence of nuclear weapons from a moral perspective. However, the risk of nuclear weapons, and tensions among nuclear powers have been rising

for decades even before and during the Obama administration (Mizumoto, 2009).

Some view that the international security environment surrounding the abolition of nuclear weapons is becoming increasingly difficult. The U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control regime is now at the verge of collapse. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) between the U.S. and Russia expired in August 2019, and no agreement has been reached between the two countries on the succeeding arrangement of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which was extended for five years upon its expiration in 2021. The growing tension between the U.S. and China over many aspects of political, economic and military issues makes great power rivalries far more complicated and riskier as well.

It is not only the deterioration of strategic relations among the major powers that makes th4e progress in nuclear disarmament difficult. Relations over nuclear weapons at the regional level have also worsened. In South Asia, competition between India and Pakistan is becoming increasingly fierce. In East Asia, the delay in North Korea's denuclearization is also a matter of serious international concern. Additionally, Iran's nuclear activities keep posing threats of nuclear proliferation and the deterioration of regional security in the Middle East.

In such a challenging environment, encouraging many people around the world to once again confront the human tragedy caused by nuclear weapons, or the result of war as "the work of man" (Pope John Paul II) will help to maintain the momentum of the citizens' movement toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. In this regard, Pope Francis' visit to the A-bombed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have a significant moralistic meaning in raising the awareness of each good citizen and renewing the determination of all people to join in the quest for nuclear abolition.

In contrast to the "reality" of international politics, in which the role of nuclear weapons seems to be reemphasized, the message of the Pope's visit to the A-bombed cities reiterated the urgent needs to face the question of nuclear ethics, stressing that a dependence on nuclear deterrence is rather a fiction, and that the genuine truth is that dependence on nuclear weapons does not make people safe but rather exposes them to great risks of survival.

This essay discusses the divergence between the "idealistic" view of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, symbolized by Pope Francis' words, and the "realist" views of

acknowledging the significance of nuclear weapons in international security in terms of the different ethical systems on which they depend, and argues the possibility of bridging the gap between the two by referring the interplay of Pope John Paul II and President Reagan on nuclear ethics and deterrence[1].

Two Messages from Pope Francis[2]

If we would like to understand Pope Francis' thoughts on nuclear abolition from the papal visit to the A-bombed cities, we need to read the two speeches at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, together.

What they have in common is a strong sense of urgency for the survival of humanity. The theme of Pope Francis' visit to Japan was "protect all life." This is in line with the three themes of the UN Agenda for Disarmament ("*Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*") announced by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in June 2018: disarmament to protect humanity, disarmament that saves lives, and disarmament for the future generation (UN, 2018). As will be discussed later, how secular politicians can implement the principles and morals that the Pope speaks of in their policies, and how to connect the two, religion and secularism, are tough challenges. The fact that the Vatican and the United Nations, both of which are symbolic associations of religious and secular communities, share the same sense of crisis for humanity and responsibility for future generations demonstrates that the sense of crisis over the existence of nuclear weapons is now widespread in the international community.

While the speeches in Nagasaki and Hiroshima are based on this sense of urgency, we can see that they speak to different audiences. The speech in Nagasaki focused on international politics and the international community's posture toward nuclear abolition, while the speech in Hiroshima seems to be a philosophical message that appeals to each individual's conscience and how to deal with nuclear weapons.

The Pope described the situation in the international community as follows: The world is in the midst of a "perverse dichotomy." And the international community is taking the wrong measures in its search for peace. In other words, it is trying to "defend and ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust," relying on the existence of nuclear weapons, but such peace is not true peace.

Then what is true peace? In his speech in Hiroshima, Pope Francis said, “if we really want to build a more just and secure society, we must let the weapons fall from our hands.” Then he quoted, “No one can love with offensive weapons in their hands” (SAINT PAUL VI, United Nations Address, 4 October 1965, 10). And he asked the people, “How can we propose peace if we constantly invoke the threat of nuclear war as a legitimate recourse for the resolution of conflicts?” Then he argued that a “true peace can only be an unarmed peace,” and peace is not “merely the absence of war, … but must be built ceaselessly.”

Another feature in the Nagasaki speech was the reference to the erosion of multilateralism. The term itself is a general expression. However, it was a strong warning of growing, acute challenges in maintaining stable relations among nations based on multilateral rules and arrangements, and the difficulties that the Review Process of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) faces. He then called on the people to act quickly and appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons based on “the principal international legal instruments of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation,” including the TPNW. In the same context, he praised on the work of the bishops of Japan, who launched an appeal for the abolition of nuclear arms, implicitly urging the world to use “prayer, tireless work in support of agreements and insistence on dialogue” as “weapons” to “put our trust and the inspiration of our efforts to build a world of justice and solidarity that can offer an authentic assurance of peace.” The speech appears to be structured in such a way that it could be interpreted as implicitly urging the Japanese government to work with it, or to encourage it to work towards building consensus in a world of justice and solidarity.

The Nagasaki speech urges that, in order to “make this ideal a reality,” the involvement of “the part of all: individuals, religious communities and civil society, countries that possess nuclear weapons and those that do not, the military and private sectors, and international organizations.” It says that humanity needs to be united in a common understanding of ethics regarding nuclear weapons, and that this unity will be made possible by joint and concerted action, inspired by “the arduous yet constant effort to build mutual trust and thus surmount the current climate of distrust” which now pervades the world.

The Latin word for “pope” is *summus pontifex*. *Summus* means “supreme,” and *pontifex* means a member of the council of priests in ancient Rome. And the word pontifex is said to be derived from “*facio* (to make) *pons* (bridge).” This could be interpreted to mean that the Pope serves as a bridge between God and people since he was long regarded as the messenger of God. At the same time Pope Francis mentioned that dialogue is a great bridge

between cultures (Kelly and Pennington, 2020). As he exhorted that the whole point of politics is to stand by each other, to face each other's problems and to understand them, it seems that when he talks about "bridge building," he is aware of the importance of connecting the two, of how to embody ideals in the field of politics and policy (reality) as well as different cultures. This is indicative and suggestive of the growing demand for bridge building for filling various gaps and divides surrounding nuclear disarmament, and discussion on how to bring the nuclear weapon states, nuclear dependent states, and the states that support the TPNW into serious dialogue.

His speech in Hiroshima seemed to emphasize a different dimension on the discourse on nuclear disarmament, as not explicitly referring to the reality of international politics surrounding nuclear disarmament, but focusing on a very philosophical message that appealed to the conscience of each individual. It made it clear that the "use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral," and warned that humanity would be judged by God if it fails to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons. He goes on to say, when we "yield to the logic of arms and distance ourselves from the practice of dialogue, we forget to our detriment that, even before causing victims and ruination, weapons can create nightmares." It was a grave concern that Pope Francis expressed with regard to the reality that we might too easily become complacent in the logic of nuclear deterrence, forgetting the reality of the very perilous situation in which we find ourselves: a society at risk of being destroyed in an instant. He also warned that the next generation may face more difficult circumstances and hoping for action from the youth.

The Pope acknowledged the existence of social, cultural, and economic differences, which can be obstacles to building peace, and therefore said that it was critical to "never justify the attempt to impose our own particular interests upon others. Indeed, those differences call for even greater responsibility and respect." As a result, "political communities are called to commit themselves to work " 'for the common cause', for the good of all," even though they may legitimately differ in terms of culture and economic growth. He urged the need to overcome differences and face each other sincerely for the sake of peace based on justice for all humanity.

In this way, the Hiroshima speech explains the philosophy of peace and the need for optimism and determination as a way to prepare for the practice of that philosophy. The message that emerges is that we should not be indifferent to the suffering of people, that

we should not turn a blind eye to the tragedy of destruction, that a world without nuclear weapons is possible if people have a strong will, and that we need to overcome our differences and work together to achieve it for the sake of human survival.

The two speeches of Pope Francis reiterate the justification and necessity of reexamining the existence of nuclear weapons from the perspective of cosmopolitan ethics, as the international security environment becomes increasingly severe, the tendency to justify the role of nuclear weapons gains momentum, and the international community becomes increasingly divided between nuclear abolition and nuclear deterrence and rejects dialogue.

Contending Ethical Systems on Nuclear Weapons

The two messages, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, paint a very clear picture of Pope Francis' wish and approach to nuclear abolition with cosmopolitanism ethics and ethics of virtue. Nevertheless, the process by which the Pope's thoughts and teachings are realized through real politics is not so simple.

The international community is divided in many ways. One of the most serious of these divisions is probably the one over their positions on the development, storage and use of nuclear weapons. On one hand, there is the argument that the existence of nuclear weapons is an important element of international security, and that nuclear weapons are necessary to ensure peace in the international community and the security of one's own country. According to this logic, nuclear deterrence is necessary to defend countries from enemy attack and to prevent the escalation of an ongoing conflict (Morgan, 1977). It is also said that in regions where the security environment is unstable, such as Northeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, the risk of nuclear proliferation is growing, which suggests that nuclear weapons are a means to ensure the survival of the country for those who believe their position is vulnerable. In these regions, there is a deep-rooted sense of mutual distrust, leading to a security dilemma (Lind, 2014). Nuclear weapons are then viewed as a response to this security dilemma[3].

On the other hand, there is an argument by abolitionists that the only way to avoid the extinction of humanity is to realize a "world without nuclear weapons." According to this argument, the use of nuclear weapons, whether intentional or based on miscalculation or misunderstanding, could have catastrophic inhumane consequences. Therefore, nuclear weapons should be banned and the abolition of it should be pursued (ICRC, 2015).

Between these two lines of thinking, there is a wide gap and deep-rooted conflicts, both policy and emotional, and it does not appear to be easy to close the divide. Meanwhile, some countries, such as Japan and some European countries, have taken the position of “bridging the gap” by first finding a common ground topic that both sides can discuss at the same table, and then getting together to discuss the relationship between humanity, national security, and nuclear weapons, and what can be done to reduce nuclear risks (EPG, 2019).

The two lines of argument over nuclear weapons are rooted in differences in views and beliefs on security and international politics. However, another reason why the divide between them is so hard to bridge may be the difference in ethical systems on which their world views are premised and constructed.

The differences in ethical systems can be categorized along two axes. The first is the geographical scope of ethics and responsibility. The position that recognizes the security role of nuclear weapons assumes that governments in the modern international system, which is built around the institution of the sovereign state, are primarily responsible for their clients within the sovereign state. Therefore, the responsibility and morality owed by the state remains within the borders and is difficult to reach outside the border. In contrast to such state-centric moral values, the position that recognizes nuclear weapons as an absolute evil and strongly promotes nuclear abolition has an ethical value system of internationalism that sees it as a matter of universal justice that transcends national borders.

Another contrast exists between the ethics of virtue or ethics of consequence (Nye, 1986). The former focuses on the nature of the person doing the deed, or personal integrity, while the latter focuses on the consequences of the deed.

According to the former logic, actions that violate moral rules or absolute good and consequently violate individual conscience or moral integrity are neither acceptable nor tolerable, even if they bring about good results in the aggregate. Applying this logic to nuclear deterrence, mutually assured destruction collateralizes the vulnerability of non-military targets such as cities, but the very act of holding their non-military value hostage would be against morality (Lee, 1985).

Meanwhile, let us now assume that the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the use of nuclear weapons (intentional or unintentional) is morally unacceptable, and that one finds absolute good in the goal of the act of nuclear abolition and acts accordingly. The result

would be a security dilemma that could lead to armed conflicts that had previously been contained by nuclear deterrence (Nye, 1986). However, based on the logic of the ethics of virtue, the universal good of nuclear abolition may still prevail over the responsibility and morality of the consequences to one's own people. How can such a dilemma be answered? (Doyle II, 2015)

On the other hand, as Morgenthau states, there is the idea that political morality exists only when political consequences are taken into account (Morgenthau, 1985). Broadly speaking, the modern international society can be seen as a collection of sovereign states. There, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states is regarded as one of the most important norms for maintaining international order, and states are assumed to act to protect their own people and territories and pursue their national interests. Then, it may not be said that it is immoral to raise the threat of using nuclear weapons to prevent an adversary from committing an act against humanity, namely the use of nuclear weapons against its own citizens, and to protect its citizens from the threat of nuclear weapons.

Even if the use of nuclear weapons is inhumane and ethically unacceptable, it can be interpreted as relatively acceptable to use the threat of nuclear weapons as a lesser evil in order to prevent such an "absolute evil" from taking place. An example is the case of deterring an opponent such as a "rogue state" that does not comply with international laws and norms that form an important element of the international order. They are often referred as a reason why nuclear deterrence would be more effective as conventional deterrence is ineffective and they would not consider proportionality in escalation.

The Interplay of Two Authorities on Nuclear Logic: Pope John Paul II and President Reagan in the 1980s

The security logic (or a sovereign states' moral system that prioritize state's pursuit of survival and national interests) that justifies the possession of nuclear weapons or nuclear deterrence appears to be very difficult to integrate with moral arguments in the current deteriorating international environment. However, there was a moment when the two moral systems seemed to converge to some extent in the 1980s, at the end of the Cold War. It was the interplay between Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Reagan over nuclear deterrence, and debate on nuclear ethics triggered by them.

The Catholic Church, with its 1.3 billion adherents, has a tremendous influence in the

international community, but more broadly, the Pope is a leader not only in other Christian denominations but also in the religious world as a whole. His influence is mainly on the moral and spiritual side of people, but the Pope's occasional comments on various issues facing society have a certain impact on the thinking of leaders and policy makers of various countries (Byrnes, 2019). However, the actual impact on international politics depends not only on how many people, including the faithful, are moved by the Pope's words, but also on the politicians who receive them.

Pope Francis' message urges all people, nuclear powers, non-nuclear powers, individuals, churches, other religions, societies, economies, and all sectors to join the movement for nuclear abolition. But it is also true, after all, that secular leaders are caught up in the pressing realities of daily politics, as exampled by President Barack Obama's attitudes toward nuclear weapons.

In his "World Without Nuclear Weapons" speech in Prague in 2009, President
Obama stated that as the first country to use nuclear weapons, the United States has a "moral responsibility" to work toward a nuclear-free world, and in a sense, created a great opportunity to bring the immorality of nuclear weapons back into the international spotlight (Obama, 2009). During his visit to Hiroshima in May 2016, President Obama described the tragedy caused by nuclear weapons as "death fell from the sky" (Obama, 2016). He seemed to suggest that the tragedy of Hiroshima was beyond human comprehension. Since he had indicated to the American public that he did not intend to apologize for the tragedy, it is likely that he used this ambiguous phrase because he felt that it would not be acceptable to use an expression that would make clear the responsibility of the United States. President Obama's speech suggests the difficulty for a leader of a sovereign state in a secular society to balance moral responsibility with accountability to a domestic audience.

When considering the interaction between religious and secular leaders in the field of nuclear disarmament, the relationship between Pope John Paul II and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s is illustrative. Of course, I do not intend to simply argue causality, but it can be said that this kind of ideological resonance between the two set the tone for the thinking and debate over nuclear reduction under the East-West détente of the 1980s.

The two men have several things in common, but the most important, along with their dislike of Soviet communism, was their views on nuclear weapons. In his first term, President Reagan called the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and took a hard line against it (Rowland

and Jones, 2016). But at the same time, he believed that the concept of mutual assured destruction (MAD), which was established by offering innocent civilians to the nuclear threat of the other side, was morally incorrect. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, commonly known as the "Star Wars Initiative") was seen as a symbol of a hard line against the Soviet Union, but it was also based on a disavowal of MAD. President Reagan said that SDI rendered "nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete," and the only reason to seek SDI was reducing nuclear danger (Reagan, 1983). In this context, it was natural for him to pursue Pope John Paul II's support for SDI, which he failed.

Pope John Paul II, who visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1981, spoke in Hiroshima of the responsibility of science and technology, of the fear that nuclear weapons might be used, and of the great effect that Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have on man's conscience (Pope John Paul II, 1981). He also emphasized the importance of morality and "responsibility" of the people to look back on the past, to think of Hiroshima as commitments to the future and peace.

Meanwhile, in his speech at the UN Special Session on Disarmament in June 1982, he stated that although it was not an end in itself, nuclear deterrence could be judged as "a morally acceptable step on the way toward a progressive disarmament. In a sense, admitting harsh reality regarding nuclear weapons and the prospect for disarmament, this speech could be seen as an attempt to pursue realism toward the realization of an ideal. It had caused a stir not only within the Church but also among security researchers, sparking a debate on the ethics of nuclear weapons.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in its report, wrote that "the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their populations by either nuclear or conventional weapons never be permitted," and even though they were "defensive response to unjust attack," if they exceed the limits of proportionality, they are morally impermissible."

As for deterrence, the report stated that "deterrence is not an adequate strategy as a long-term basis for peace," and "no use of nuclear weapons which would violate the principles of discrimination or proportionality may be intended in a strategy of deterrence." "The moral demands of Catholic teaching require resolute willingness not to intend or to do moral evil even to save our own lives or the lives of those we love."

The report also mentioned the ethical questions on limited nuclear war, and expressed its

skepticism about the real meaning of "limited" and said that given the just-war teaching on reasonable hope of success in bringing about justice and peace, the responsibility of proof of meaningful limitation must be bore by those who assert such a notion.

This view of the Catholic Church has triggered reflection on the morality of nuclear weapons among practitioners and academics alike. The quote at the top of this essay is a part of the speech by George Kennan at Princeton in 1981, a prominent diplomat and researcher who sent a long telegram from Moscow to his home country immediately after World War II, which can be said to have shaped the U.S. policy of containment of the Soviet Union and opened the history of the Cold War for the next 40 years (Kennan, 1983). Joseph Nye, Jr. also argued for the ethical validity of nuclear use and deterrence in his book, *Nuclear Ethics* (Nye, 1986).

As history has shown, these initiatives by secular and religious leaders never truly came to a final reconciliation or fusion. However, thinking of the bleak times we live in today, where in 2016 then-U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump said that a wall should be built on the border with Mexico, to which Pope Francis responded, by saying that we should build a bridge, not a wall, could the Church's move towards "conscience," towards a positive view of the ideal of nuclear abolition, and towards finding a way of reconciling it with reality, have some implications for the way in which we face difficult issues today - what we might call "decency"? Could this be an inspiration for the way we deal with difficult issues such as the total elimination of nuclear weapons today?

Conclusion

It would be a harsh reality if the concerted expression of moral demands by moral entrepreneurs and global civil society groups will not be enough to achieve nuclear disarmament. This is not to say that moral pressure from such groups is not necessary. On the contrary, without moral and ethical pressure, NPT signatories are unlikely to reconsider their nuclear options. Rather, that demand must be linked to a series of efforts to cause political interactions among rival states. It must resolve, transcend, or significantly mitigate the dilemmas of security, status, and trust.

But can the dilemma between the different moral and ethical systems be resolved? There is a kind of irony lurking. That is to say, in order to counter the nuclear threat, one has to admit the rhetorical twist of justifying nuclear deterrence for the protection of one's own people

on the basis of the assumption that the use of nuclear weapons is morally an absolute evil. Such a logic is a restraint on the pursuit of a universal good, leaving the concerns of each sovereign state intact. How can the morality and ethics of nuclear abolition, as a universal value for humanity or/and motivated by humanitarian imperative, converge with the moral and ethical system that defines the nature of sovereign states in the contemporary international society and justifies nuclear deterrence as the responsibility of the state in the nation-state system that defines the social contractual relationship between government and people?

The existence of nuclear weapons is one of the greatest long-outstanding questions that arouses a sense of crisis in the next generation against the current state of affairs in international politics. Politics today no longer speaks of ideals while imposing a negative legacy that the current generation created to the next generation, whose risk may not be recoverable. No matter how difficult real politics is and how far away it is from being realized, it is still important as a principle to deal with the problem, to face the difficulty sincerely and to keep talking about the ideal by the realizing mutual responsibility to ensure a common future.

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Notes

[1] Needless to say, power relations among states and morality are not the only factors that define the behavior of states in international politics. The roles of international laws and international regimes, in regulating the behavior of states also needs to be taken into account. However, this essay will focus on the role of the moral systems as a guideline to be adhered to by policy makers in determining their behavior including compliance with legal norms.

[2] Quotes of Pope Francis in this section are from the two following addresses otherwise stated: *Address of the Holy Father on Nuclear Weapons* in Nagasaki, and *Address of the Holy Father* at Meeting for Peace in Hiroshima.

[3] Sagan (1996-97) also added two rationales, namely the domestic political model, in which nuclear weapons are considered as tools to advance parochial domestic bureaucratic interests, and the norms model, in which nuclear weapons are considered as normative symbols of a state’s modernity and identity. In terms of the linkage of these models with the argument of moral systems, it could be an interesting question whether the norms model could be transformed in a way that nuclear weapons would come to be considered as symbols of obsoleteness of state’s perspective on the future and common cause of human beings.