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Fear and Folly

The path to development of nuclear weapons was paved with fear. Despite it being a tremendous scientific breakthrough, the creation of nuclear weapons was not spurred by ingenuity, necessity, or the quest for knowledge, but instead by overwhelming fear. There is great irony in the belief that by creating and possessing a nuclear weapon, we can somehow ensure our safety. Now that the urgency has passed, the race finished, and the weapons made, we look back on what we have created not with pride, but with dumbfounded horror.

Humans have control over their environment and influence over others, but only to a certain extent, and rightly so. But now, with the birth of nuclear weapons, humans have the power not only to destroy their environment and their enemies, but also themselves. Therefore, deploying such a weapon is the most unnatural and destructive act. The detonation of a nuclear weapon releases a fireball with temperatures close to those at the core of the Sun, and that is only the beginning of its long-reigning force and impact.¹ There is evidence on the effects of radiation on human health up to a decade later, with illnesses such as various cancers, blood disorders, and cataracts.² It is the kind of destructive power that no man should seek to have, let alone to possess and possibly employ.

It is clear that there is nothing to be gained in the use of nuclear weapons. It is no longer a symbol of political power, military prowess, or national security, but an emblem of unwarranted folly and great peril for us all. It has been deteriorating international relations since its conception, preventing true diplomacy and cooperation between nations. A war fought with nuclear weapons is a war against all of humanity, for its destructiveness does not discriminate. There can be no winners, only losers. There can be no targeted foe, only the entirety of the human race itself.

The story of nuclear weapons certainly has an ending, and we are perilously standing on the edge of deciding what the ending will be. Thus the question that Beatrice Fihn poses in her 2017 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech is most fitting and immediate, and one which we all must confront. "Will it be the end of the nuclear weapons, or will it be the end of us?"

References

- 1 "The Effects of Nuclear Weapons." Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/technology/nuclear-weapon/The-effects-of-nuclear-weapons.

2 The Nuclear Arms Race: Technology and Society, by Paul P. Craig and John A. Jungerman,
McGraw-Hill Pub. Co., 1990, p. 17.