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AWAKENING AMERICA - BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

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"The shaft of the arrow had been feathered with one of the eagle's own plumes. We often give our enemies the means of our own destruction."

â€” Aesop's Fables

America has been warned in every conceivable fashion that its nuclear weapons will bring it to a bad end.

It was warned by scientists on its own atomic bomb project, even before it bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it was warned by the destruction of those cities.

It was warned by Mahatma Gandhi that it was too early to see what nuclear weapons would do the soul of the attacking nation.

It was warned by Albert Einstein that we must change our modes of thinking or face "unparalleled catastrophe."

It has been warned by Nobel Laureates, by generals and admirals, by small countries and large ones.

It was warned by Bertrand Russell, J. Robert Oppenheimer and Linus Pauling.

It was warned by the Cuban missile crisis, and by other near disasters.

It was warned by the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that human beings and nuclear weapons cannot co-exist.

It has been warned by religious leaders that nuclear weapons jeopardize creation.

It was warned by head of the US Strategic Command, General Lee Butler, that "we cannot at once keep sacred the miracle of existence and hold sacrosanct the capacity to destroy it."

It was warned by the mayors of cities and by earnest citizen groups.

It was warned by drop drills, fall-out shelters and false alerts.

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It has been warned and warned until the sirens should be screaming in the White House and in the halls of Congress.

But we live in a time of political leaders lacking a moral compass, of political leaders unable to change their thinking or to shed their hubris.

Since nuclear weapons are the most cowardly weapon ever created, we live in a time of leaders marked by a significant courage-deficit.

All signs suggest that we are headed toward disaster, toward a world in which America itself will be sacrificed at the altar of its hubris.

We have become too attached to our double standards, to a world of nuclear "haves" and "have-nots."

We spend on nuclear weapons and their delivery systems what it would cost to feed the world's hungry, shelter the world's homeless, care for the world's sick and infirm, and educate the world's children.

In our comfortable reliance on our military might, we have failed to grasp that nuclear weapons are a far more powerful tool in the hands of the weak than in the hands of the strong.

We have failed to grasp that America cannot afford to again use nuclear weapons, but extremist groups are eager to obtain these weapons and use them against us.

We have failed to grasp that there is no defense against nuclear weapons, as we throw money into missile defenses like a helpless giant.

America stands at increasing risk that its great cities will be destroyed by nuclear weapons.

Our cities, our economy and our pride will fall together.

When this happens, America will bellow and flail, flames will shoot from its nostrils, and the survivors will wonder how America was brought so low.

Looking back, some will remember with dismay the many, many warnings. Others will say that it was karma.

This is a glimpse into our future, yet another warning. The worst has not yet happened.

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It is not too late for America to wake up, to fulfill its obligations for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, and to lead the world to a nuclear weapons-free planet.

It is late, but it is not too late. America may still wake up, and if it does it will be because people like all of us have not given up on America or on a human future.

It will be because ordinary Americans do not have the courage-deficit that our leaders have so readily and consistently displayed.

It will be because the voices of the people rise up and demand change and because we become the leaders we have been waiting for.

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He is the author of a recent book of peace poetry, *Today Is Not a Good Day for War*.