

HIROSHIMA - NAGASAKI - OKINAWA

Some reflections on Japan, peace and
war *

by Johan Galtung

Université Nouvelle Transnationale
154 Rue de Tolbiac
F75013 Paris

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Dear friends,

We are commemorating the Fortieth Anniversary of the bomb; we are in year 40 of the atomic age initiated 16 July 1945 with the test explosion in Algorodo, New Mexico, U.S.A. The world will never be the same, not because nuclear chain reactions were discovered, not because the bomb was made, but because it was used, even for genocide, even with no clear military necessity. We are commemorating these disastrous events, in search of alternatives--of energy alternatives to nuclear energy, of security alternatives to the insecurity based on nuclear weapons and a nuclear arms race which may spell doom for all of us, if past experience with arms races between powers in confrontation is a guide.

And we are commemorating under the sign of ever-rising Japanese militarism, not only in the sense of increasing manpower for the self-defence forces and much more steeply increasing budgets for those forces, making the military in Japan more capital intensive, more modern and probably also more equipped with offensive capability. Much more importantly, we are commemorating under the sign of the Yasukuni shrine, the shrine dedicated to the military war dead and increasingly embedded into the national myth of Japan through acts of the leadership in general and the present prime minister, himself a former director-general of the self-defence forces, in particular.

Now let me point out that the way Hiroshima-Nagasaki is remembered also serves the interests of Japanese militarism, unfortunately. More particularly, I am thinking of the portrayal of Japan as the victim, casting Japan unambiguously in that role. Of course, the comparison with Pearl Harbour might justify this: as far as I have understood, only eight civilians were killed in the Pearl Harbour attack, which seems to have been a very clean, surgical operation against military installations. But Pearl Harbour nevertheless took place. It certainly was an act of war, and although it is overshadowed completely in terms of its consequences--both immediate, short-run and long-run, both human and political--by Hiroshima-Nagasaki, to leave it out brings about a dangerous curtailment or telescoping of history. In so doing the Japanese left and the Japanese in the middle politically bring material, every year in the month of August--but also throughout

the year--that can be processed by the Japanese right into self-righteous self-pity. Now be a victim again!, strong defence postures; and in the deeper recesses of the Japanese right possibly also thoughts of revenge, and not only in the obvious economic sense.

On the other hand, if the war did not start August 1945, it did not start December 1941 either. This is the American telescoping of history, creating an image of the Pacific war literally speaking out of the blue, with no pre-history. The sanctions subsequent to the invasion of Manchuria 1931 are conveniently forgotten, leaving the Japanese leadership with the false choice between economic starvation if the export of demographic surplus to Manchuria would have to be given up, and military capitulation if a war would not succeed. Being doomed in either case, the bushido spirit would certainly steer in the direction of the second type of defeat, one possible explanation for Pearl Harbour later on. But only one: it may also well be that some circles among the Japanese leadership had more expansionist intentions, at least colonizing Hawaii.

However, the war did not start with the sanctions either, nor with the invasion of Manchuria. Preceding the invasion of Manchuria were the takeovers of Okinawa 1879, Taiwan 1894-95, Korea 1910-11, and subsequent to Manchuria 1931 the invasion of China from 1937 onwards.

However, the war did not start with these expansionist expressions of the inherent potential of Japanese imperialism either. If it started at one point, one would rather have to go back to Commodore Parry and his fleet of grey ships, in the 1850's and 1854 in particular, displaying his incredible arrogance not only in Honshu, Tokyo-Yokohama, but also on these islands, in Okinawa. He planted a seed in the Japanese leadership later leading to the Meiji Revolution, transforming Japan into a country preserving much of her old characteristics yet being homologous with the industrial expansionist nations of the occident. Commodore Parry was probably only thinking of his and U.S. actio,

not much of the reactio that might follow - in the true spirit of occidental expansionism. The world as hunting-ground, not as a system; as an object to be moved around, not as a subject in its own right,

Does that mean that the Second World War in the Pacific started with Commodore Perry? Or, did it start with the War of Independence of the United States, planting in the U.S. leadership the seed that the other side of the Atlantic could not be trusted, that it might one day come and try to get back what they lost of their American "possessions", and that a turn to the Pacific might be useful in order to have something in the reserve?

Undoubtedly, pursuing this line of thought further, we quickly get lost in the mists of history. The causal impact of such events through the long chain or chains we might try to unwind becomes attenuated, diverted in too many directions to provide us with a clear impulse that in the 1940's may serve to explain, unambiguously, the Pacific War. But that is actually not my concern: I am not engaged in an effort to trace causal connections. Rather, my concern is how futile it may be to try to put the blame, and possibly also the guilt, inside one actor in an international system, or in any social system for that matter. The whole significance of the word "system" is exactly that this may be unjustified; the system is based on interaction, not only on action. "You started" is the logic of the kindergarten between quarrelling children, certainly not the logic that adults should engage in. We are all spun together in time and space, in a web of highly complex relations. At many points there are choices to be made, and we may deeply deplore the course of action taken because of the consequences. But a choice is not made in a causal vacuum. A much more rational pursuit than distributing blame, looking for the guilty "who did it", would be to analyse the causes leading to the unfortunate choice and then try to create the circumstances that might lead to more felicitous choices next time.

And this is where the U.S. crime in dropping those two bombs is located. We have heard much about U.S. "decision-making" in connection with those bombs these days, on the occasion of the

Fortieth Anniversary. Much of it has a very aggressive anti-Japanese tone, not heard on earlier occasions as far as I can remember. Why this aggressiveness forty years later, when the memories of the war should be relatively pale, except among relatively old people, most of them socially, if not yet biologically retired?

No doubt one reason is the incredible rise in U.S. militarism under the Reagan administrations, "Militarism" includes such aspects as extreme anti-sovietism, even in a period where Soviet behaviour is very mild relative to what it was in Stalinist days, and the display of readiness to use extreme weapons. Any argument to the effect that the bomb should perhaps rather not have been used against Japan could be seen as a sign of readiness not to use that bomb against the Soviet Union if the case should come. The Soviet Union should not be safer than the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They died to instill fear in citizens all over the world.

But then there is another and perhaps more important explanation: the incredible success of the Japanese economic miracle, from 1% of the US GNP in 1945 to an estimated 50% in 1985 - in a period where the US did not stand still either. In the US the combined effects of militarism and the Japanese economic offensive show up as an equally incredible budget deficit, trade deficit particularly relative to Japan, and capital deficit, meaning that the US--a net debtor--has to import much more capital than it exports whereas Japan--a major world creditor--does the opposite. Japan not only delivers consumer goods to US citizens, invests in capital goods in the US to produce more consumer goods, but also finances a considerable portion of the US budget deficit, meaning that Japan finances parts of US militarism. Of course not alone but together with the people in the indebted Third World countries forced into a life of continued or even deteriorating poverty through the debts incurred by the systems set up by negotiating elites in Third World and First World countries. The First World lends money to the Third World and does not get it back; Japan lends money to the US and presumably gets it back. At the same time the US is unable to get a better trade balance through the second of the two obvious methods, by exporting more. It

may slowly be dawning upon them that this is not so much because of Japanese governmental policies as simply because the quality of US products is too low relative to the price. Obviously sooner or later the second option will be taken: to import less, and the Japanese have already prepared themselves for many years for this shock by investing more, so as to produce locally. What the reaction to that approach will be is for the future to see, but I have dark suspicions.

I think it is important to realise that it is in this context we are suggesting alternative security policies. Examples of such policies are spelt out in my book There are alternatives!, published in English by the Bertrand Russell Foundation in Nottingham, Spokesman Press, and so far also appearing in German, Dutch, Spanish, Norwegian translations with Swedish, Italian and Japanese translations coming. I only want to preface my short summary of some of the major points of that book with some remarks.

Thus, I think it is very important that we should be politically realistic in our efforts to design alternative security policies, and alternative energy policies. Let us face it: we live in countries dominated by materialist individualism, by consumerism, with the majority of the population in love with the United States as a symbol of successful consumerism; and with "security," using military means, possibly with alliances, as the way to guarantee that this will continue, if not for ever at least for our lifetime. At the same time we have military organisations of colossal size, particularly if we include the arms industry. And, we have, on top of that, not only a nuclear strategy, but a strategy relying on extremely offensive weapons that can be used for attack even if they are only intended for retaliation; as for defense, as the SDI. Many of these weapons are called "conventional" but are actually weapons of mass destruction.

As mentioned, the US crime consisted in opening the option of using atomic weapons. Our task is to create the circumstances under which that option should be closed, and I think that can only be done by opening sufficiently adequate alternative options. Of course,

the conventional answer--that we have atomic weapons only in order to prevent the others--from using theirs does not convince anyone but those unacquainted with the history of arms races. I repeat: the US crime consists in changing the nature of the arms race, not in killing exceptionally many civilians, that they had already done together with their allies in the massive bombardments of Japan and Germany, even higher numbers than they killed in Hiroshima-Nagasaki. And the shock effect on the Japanese leadership could have been obtained through a demonstration in an uninhabited part of Japan, combined with a massive US encircling of the Japanese archipelago, also with the use of Soviet forces. On the other hand, this was probably exactly what the US did not want: The US should win alone, the atom bomb had to be dropped before the Soviet Union could play a really important role in the Pacific theatre, and thereby establish rights of access. Moreover, the US wanted revenge; the Soviet Union actually had a non-aggression pact with Japan.

Let us now look at the two subjects of disarmament and the alliance with the US, in the case of Japan, from the point of view of a more realistic peace movement.

First, I think disarmament is a totally unrealistic option. There is no such thing and I do not think there will be such a thing this side of the year, say, 5,000. Nor am I convinced that it is so important. A country can be heavily armed and very able to defend itself, and yet not constitute a threat, not even a provocation to neighbouring countries. The key is to possess only defensive military capability, not offensive capability that can also be used for attack even if the official motivation is only to use the capability for retaliation. Of defensive defense there are three types: conventional military weapons with short-range and high level of precision; paramilitary forces based on small units, highly mobile, locally based and supported by the civilian population, and non-military defence, involving potentially the whole population. Although I myself am a pacifist and would only participate in the third type of defensive defence, I do not think I have the right to deny other parts of the population who do not believe in non-military

defence, the right to defend themselves against an attack. In my ideal image of a country, there is a well institutionalised human right guaranteeing to all citizens the possibility of defending themselves in the way they think is the most effective one, guaranteeing to no citizen the right to attack other countries, not even in retaliation. Actually, among the 29 countries in Europe outside the Soviet Union, some countries have defence systems of exactly this type: Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Albania, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Malta - with varying mixes of the three types of defensive defence.

Second, as to the US-Japan alliance: I think one should make a distinction between the nuclear aspect of the alliance, which would disappear if Japan were to adopt a doctrine of defensive defence, and an alliance as a symbol of friendship, political coordination, perhaps also defence coordination although it should be pointed out that the very logistics used to help an ally in times of war can also be used for attack for the simple reason that they are long-range. As mentioned above: the US is an ideal for large parts of our populations, whether we like it or not. For that reason, the US can get away with the most incredible political crimes around the world whereas the smallest detail of how Academician Sakharov is treated in his imposed exile is given good display in our totally biased press. No doubt this will change, but possibly not much this side of year 2,000, unless US-Japanese relations should deteriorate further very quickly for the economic reasons mentioned above - a possibility that should not be ruled out as there are very strong emotions involved on either side.

But one could perhaps hope for something else: a rational awakening of people in both blocks, to the rather obvious fact that most of the Cold War does not stem from relations between the two blocs, but from the delicate balances between the US government, allied governments and the peoples in the Western bloc - and between the Soviet party, allied parties and the peoples in the Eastern bloc. The US government offers protection against external and internal enemies on the condition that its leadership is accepted, and that there is--by and large-- consensus within and among allies; the Soviet party offers allied parties protection against internal

and external enemies precisely on the same conditions. When the means of protection, the military hardware/software, undergoes "modernisation" people become less convinced that the means are not more dangerous than the threat they are supposed to prevent, and a peace movement arises in the Western alliance. The allied governments are caught in the middle between their obligations to the US government, most of them secret and even unwritten, and their obligations to the people in countries that style themselves democratic. The history of the Cold War is to a large extent the history of how these governments manoeuvred under such circumstances, one approach being to offer better economic prospects as a spin-off from the new phase of the armament race, the SDI being a good example; another technique being the promise of a new round of "disarmament talks," and if that does not sound convincing enough, even a "summit meeting." Incidentally, we are just witnessing this farcical part of the cycle this fall, the tragedy having already taken part, the deployment of the land-based, so-called middle-range missiles, in four of the stationing countries in Western Europe (Netherlands still keeping out). Can we not get out of such feudal relations?

In short, what I am proposing is not disarmament, but transarmament, a shift in military doctrine and consequently military hardware and software from deterrence based on retaliation to deterrence based on defence; from defence based on a possible attack, to defence based on defence, to put it that way. It should be noted that this does not imply the abolition of the military-bureaucratic-corporate-intelligentsia complexes, only that they should devote themselves to defensive rather than offensive intents and capabilities. Nor does it imply the dissolution of military forces. Just to the contrary: you will be surprised if you dialogue with military people to find how many of them, perhaps even the majority would agree with this change in military doctrine. And that constitutes an important challenge to the peace movement: to see military people as potential friends rather than enemies in the struggle for peace - as we have so gratefully acknowledged in Western Europe, with our excellent generals/admirals for peace, and the many officers of lower ranks who are not in a position to

come out openly, but yet support us with technical advice and encouragement.

When it comes to alliance matters, what I propose is not to think in terms of dissolution of these alliances since they are so deeply rooted in the world structure at present. What I am proposing is to take the offensive, in both meanings of this term, aspect out of them, through a change of military doctrine, retaining them as ways of grouping relatively similar countries where at least the elites are friendly to each other, together, possibly for negotiating disarmament processes in a world more ready for them after some transarmament processes have taken place. And to become less servile, less client countries - able to protect themselves without depending on any super-master--yet without being a danger to their neighbors, not provoking them into arms races.

I propose these two points as a basis for a realistic Japanese peace movement. I know they are against the total disarmament and complete non-alignment policies advocated by many in the peace movement. But, the fact is that such policies have not mobilized majority support - and the reason may be with the peace movement, not with the majority. Maybe the peace movement has been too busy documenting excellently the effects of nuclear war and the extent of militarism to think of realistic alternatives? And maybe that is also the shortcoming of Japanese peace research, twenty years old, and yet remarkably underdeveloped and unimaginative - mainly copying and commenting on peace research in the West?

In short, there is enough work to do. Let us only hope that we still have time.

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