

dialogue



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decisions

change

minds



**dialogue**  
**on nuclear disarmament**  
**with decision-makers**



**IPPNW**

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**Dialogue on nuclear disarmament with decision makers**

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# I. changing minds

Xanthe Hall

## Changing Minds



**Xanthe Hall**

**"The most difficult thing for both us and decision-makers to do is simply to listen."**

The booklet you have in your hands attempts to give a new and different perspective on the issue of dialogues with decision makers. The authors – Inga Blum and Sarah Koch – are not speaking from years and years of experience of talking to decision-makers, but are giving us a fresh look at a programme that IPPNW has been running for more than ten years. Some of the questions they ask are ones that have not been adequately discussed in the past, if at all. It is therefore worth taking a new look through their eyes at this method and applying a competence that is richly present among the ranks of IPPNW – psychology.

I can, however, speak from experience. Having taken part in literally hundreds of conversations with decision-makers, I can truly say that it can be worthwhile, but only if there is respect on both sides and both are prepared to listen to the arguments of the other. I have also run several workshops to train doctors and medical students in the dialogue method and discovered that the most difficult thing for both us and decision-makers to do is simply to listen.

The IPPNW student programme, the Nuclear Weapons Inheritance Project (NWIP), which also conducts dialogue, has a very different remit to the physician's programme, Dialogue with Decision Makers (DWDM). Because the NWIP students are conducting dialogue with other students, the basis for their interaction is less fraught with assumptions and prejudice, and the method of active listening is easier to employ. The students they are talking to are also less set in their beliefs, nor do they have a political position to defend that perhaps even their job depends on. Nevertheless, there is much to be learnt from this programme that could be applied to the DWDM programme. The simplicity of the questions they ask each other may seem to be over-obvious to us, but they may be the questions we should be asking decision-makers.

I would like to give a couple of examples of interactions between young people and decision-makers, that made me realise the strength of giving them the floor.

In 2005 at the Review Conference on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in New York, which went down in history as one of the worst Review Conferences ever, the German groups decided to "lobby" their official delegation somewhat differently. We had arranged a meeting with the full delegation and about 40 of us were due to take part, of which more than two-thirds were youth and students. The number was clearly too large for a classic dialogue situation, so we decided to divide the group up and cluster around specific issues. Each group had a "mentor" whose job it was to help the inexperienced members of the cluster understand their topic better. Then each cluster devised a question for a youth delegate to put to the delegation, usually prefaced by a comment. One older member of the group was tasked with introducing them as the "head" of our delegation.

The meeting went extremely well and it was obvious that the official delegation was very surprised at the niveau of the questions and comments. Because the questioners were so well-prepared, they could not be brushed-off with simple or condescending answers like "you wouldn't understand, diplomacy (or politics) doesn't work like that". Any attempt to circumvent questions was followed up by a gentle reminder that the question had not been answered. The patience of the

young people to listen to long and, sometimes, boring answers was quite astounding. But the highlight came right at the end. One young man simply stated that in his view the older generation had failed his generation in not getting rid of nuclear weapons and that he did not want to inherit the mess they were leaving behind. The head of the official delegation was visibly moved. He simply answered that they were really trying to do their best.

In my view, that diplomat and the others at that meeting did begin from that moment on to try harder. The relationship between us changed. They turned up to our actions and meetings, they were more open to our arguments, they were prepared to listen. I cannot say for sure that it was that meeting that changed their minds about us, but I have a feeling that it was.

Another example I would like to share with you happened only recently at a German foreign office conference in Berlin. This was attended by several hundred of the most expert people from Germany and other countries on the topic of “Global Zero – Challenges along the path to a world free of nuclear weapons”. In the audience were not only proponents of Global Zero, but also adversaries who spoke out strongly against abolition. On the various panels there was only one strong supporter of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, all others were much more reticent to support true zero and very few wanted to discuss more than the first few steps towards disarmament. General Klaus Naumann, former head of the NATO military committee and current member of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) spoke in the final panel on the need for abolition while still strongly defending nuclear deterrence. And then a young woman in the audience stood up and asked how the words “nuclear weapons” and “security” could be used in the same sentence? As a member of the younger generation that did not live through the Cold War, this would seem to her to be a contradiction and she did not understand why nuclear weapons had not yet been abolished. The General was perplexed. He was unable to formulate an answer immediately and fumbled his way through an attempt at justification for his perception of security based on history.

Both these examples show how young people made decision-makers think. In the first case it possibly even made them change their minds, at least about us, which enabled them to listen.

In May 2008, a group of students conducted a simulation of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) during an NPT Preparatory Committee in Geneva. The students taking part in the simulation game were tasked with speaking to the official delegates of different countries to ask them their opinion on negotiating a NWC. Probably the most helpful delegation for the students was the Iranian delegation, whereas the German delegation found it difficult to even imagine taking part in such negotiations.

This exercise was repeated in 2010. I am quite convinced that these interactions between students and diplomats added to the dialogue work that IPPNW and other groups conducted all over the world in their capitals and that of the Middle Powers Initiative (MPI) in trying to get the NWC onto the NPT agenda.

Motivated by the experience in 2008 in Geneva, I worked with NWIP on a training weekend and simulation in Berlin in February 2009. IPPNW and other students prepared for and conducted meetings with decision-makers in order to simulate a parliamentary debate on the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Germany. Sarah Koch took part in this weekend and it led to her returning to talk to decision-makers on her own in order to write her thesis “Good reasons for nuclear weapons? Exploring reasoning patterns of political actors and decision-makers” which is included in this booklet, translated into English. After reading her thesis, I began to wonder how much these two interactions with parliamentarians and government representatives might have actually influenced the debate. Before these meetings there had been no vote in favour of withdrawal and yet afterwards there was. Of course, it was not simply these meetings with students that achieved this result. There was a nationwide campaign involving 50 organisations. But I remain convinced that they played a crucial part in this outcome.

But how can we be sure that our dialogues are having an effect? This is where a systematic analysis of our DWDM programme could be helpful. Are there test questions that we could ask at every meeting to measure if or how much a decision-maker has shifted his opinion? Can we identify the psychological reason for why a particular decision-maker is still in favour of retaining nuclear weapons and develop a response that would help him or her question that basic premise?

Sometimes we are so busy trying to get across our point that we forget the point of dialogue. Dialogue is meant to bring us closer to one another. It does not mean that you have to change your mind about nuclear weapons, but it should mean that you change your mind about one another thus allowing views to be more openly exchanged. This can then lead to a decision-maker taking a different perspective when talking to his colleagues thereby influencing the debate. Talking to us can break down “groupthink”, the tendency of decision-makers to only talk to one another and therefore think like one another. But in order to do that, we have to make sure we are not also involved in our own “group think”.

Recently, I took part in a working lunch with politicians and ministry staff on the subject of “Global Zero”. One of the participants explained, in quite emotional terms, why he was in favour of retaining nuclear weapons. I have to say, it was the first time I understood this argument on an emotional level. He was quite a young man, and he said that his parents and grandparents had experienced two World Wars in Germany in which many millions died in the most excessive violence experienced in history. This ended with the introduction of nuclear weapons. They believed that the only way to halt the destructive upward spiral of mankind was to make it face its ultimate destruction, the end of the world. This meant that there were no more World Wars. This is what is meant when it is argued that nuclear weapons keep the peace.

Now, you and I can probably think of plenty of logical and rational arguments to counter this claim. But logic and rationality are not the basis of this belief. There is a traumatic experience at the root of it that has caused an emotional response. A whole family has taken on this belief and it has been passed on down generations. It has been taken on, like a mission, by this young man. Nuclear deterrence



is based on the belief that mankind is so destructive it must be protected from further acts of destruction through the ultimate threat. It is a loss of trust in the basic goodness of human nature replaced by containment through a kind of biological will to survive. In his opinion, nuclear weapons won't be used because we cannot self-destruct. This is why the Kissinger, Schultz et al. new perspective on abolition is for many conservatives so compelling. They do not argue that nuclear weapons or deterrence are in themselves wrong, they argue that deterrence can no longer work because dictators and terrorists are capable of acts of insanity. These are not tactical arguments, they are based on real fear. And this fear stems from a experience of war that most of us have never had.

This is why when we talk about nuclear weapons, we really do need to be talking about security. NWIP asks the question "what is security?" in their dialogues. What do we fear most? Is it attack from a belligerent country or is it that our planet may not survive? Is it a terrorist bomb or is it that we might get cancer? My biggest worry is that my son will get run over by a car. What makes us feel secure? Is it that we are cared for by our families when we are sick or that we have friends who can help us, or is it that our country is fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan? Why do we think that Iran might attack us with nuclear weapons and do we therefore need missile defence? Do we need to worry about another World War? There are no "right" answers to these questions. But there are underlying reasons for every answer.

Discussions with decision-makers on these kinds of questions could lead IPPNW to deal more comprehensively with the nuclear weapons issue, perhaps looking more closely at the related issues, such as trauma and war, paranoia and lack of security. This is why the psychological aspect of the dialogue method deserves to be given more consideration, in my view. Otherwise, we might as well be talking to the wall.



Xanthe Hall (r) and Henrik Salander (l), Chair of the Middle Powers Initiative, at the public event "Towards a nuclear weapon-free world" in Berlin, January 2009





## II. good reasons for nuclear weapons?

Sarah Koch



Sarah Koch

**"those advocating nuclear disarmament should be familiar with common argument patterns used by political and military decision-makers"**

## Good reasons for nuclear weapons? Reasoning patterns of decision-makers

### 1. Motivation for and goals of my diploma thesis

Reasons against nuclear weapons are widely communicated and recognized by the public. In contrast, the reasons and argument patterns of nuclear weapon proponents are not so easily to access. However, to enable an open and constructive dialogue, those advocating nuclear disarmament should be familiar with common argument patterns used by political and military decision-makers. Having witnessed the rejection of a motion claiming to end Germany's nuclear sharing by the majority of the German parliament, I wanted to learn more about the reasons and motives of political decision-makers who are not doing everything they can to abolish nuclear weapons. Motivated by astonishment and curiosity, I have formulated the title of my diploma thesis: "Good reasons for nuclear weapons? Exploring reasoning patterns of political actors and decision-makers". I wanted to use qualitative psychological research techniques to explore the arguments and reasoning of decision-makers when thinking and talking about nuclear weapons. Additionally, I wanted to use findings from psychological research to describe and analyse dynamics of the nuclear disarmament discourse. As a result of the thesis, a system of reasoning patterns has been developed – it aims at being used by NGOs and civil society organisations which are working for disarmament, challenging military mindsets, attempting to pave new ways towards a security that relies on trust and mutual understanding rather than control and protection.

#### Who are the "real" decision-makers?

The term "decision-makers" refers to individuals involved in political or military decisions-making procedures relevant to nuclear security strategies or nuclear disarmament. This includes, amongst many others, representatives of national parliaments who contribute to the decision-making by bringing in and voting for or against motions that are relevant to nuclear disarmament. But who are the "real", the influential, the crucial decision-makers? McLean et al. (1989) point out that representatives elected by the people only have little influence on decisions in the field of nuclear weapons and disarmament. According to the authors, the leading part could rather be found within the military and nuclear industry. For this paper, the term "decision-makers" refers to all important contact persons for national or international NGOs working for nuclear disarmament – decision-makers that do not fully agree with or support the NGO's positions and visions e.g. for a world free of nuclear weapons.

#### The method: qualitative interviews with political decision-makers

The diploma thesis took a very explorative and open approach. For the study, qualitative semi-structured interviews with 15 political actors were conducted and analysed (delegates of the German parliament - members either of the committee for foreign affairs, the committee for defence or the committee for disarmament and non-proliferation, and representatives of the German government – a diplo-

mat and a government advisor in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation). As the reader can imagine, none of these dialogue partners would wholeheartedly support the existence or the use of nuclear weapons. Still, the interviewees represented a wide range of different and opposing opinions towards nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament.

### **The main questions**

The questions I had in mind when I prepared for my thesis were the following:

- What kind of memories and emotions do decision-makers associate with nuclear weapons?
- What advantages and risks do decision-makers see in nuclear weapons?
- What reasons are pronounced by decision-makers when they speak either in favour of or against nuclear weapons?
- What reasons do decision-makers have when speaking in favour or against nuclear disarmament?
- What are the motives, worries, priorities of those speaking in favour of nuclear weapons or being reluctant about nuclear disarmament?
- How do decision-makers deal with the complexity of the issue?
- What are personal attitudes and priorities of decision-makers when reflecting about their own position and function within the political system?

## **The three main goals of the thesis**

### **1.1 Explore reasoning patterns of decision-makers**

One major goal was to find out more about the associations, reasons and arguments of political decision-makers when thinking and talking about nuclear weapons and when taking position either in support or against certain measures in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. As a result, a system of reasoning patterns could be described (see Chapter 2).

### **1.2 Apply findings from psychological research to nuclear disarmament**

A second goal was the attempt to use findings from social psychology as well as models from communication psychology, peace research and conflict moderation to both describe the dynamics of international disarmament negotiations as well as to optimize NGOs efforts in peace dialogue. The following concepts and models will be referred to (see Chapter 3):



**"Dialogue should be open and unbiased and is characterized by attentive and empathic listening"**

- The differentiation between “direct and structural violence” is a widely known concept, developed in the field of peace research by Johan Galtung (1969). Galtung defined “direct” violence as the obvious part of a conflict which causes destruction, injury and death. The “structural” violence refers to underlying structures of a conflict such as inequality or poverty. Additionally, Galtung differentiates between “negative” and “positive” peace, whereas “negative” peace is “the mere absence of direct violence”, and “positive peace” is characterized by a minimum of structural violence and is therefore a state of freedom, development and creativity.
- The concept of “identity conflict” originates from the field of conflict management (Rothman 1997) and could help to describe the complex and intractable nature of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The “ARIA model” is a possible tool to deal with such an identity conflict by transferring a state of polarization between “us vs. them” (“good vs. bad”, “reasonable vs. irrational”) into a state of an empathic perspective-taking.
- Social psychologists have described the “fundamental attribution error” - the tendency to overweight internal traits such as personality and character when describing behaviour and actions of “the others”, neglecting circumstances and external restraints. A similar phenomenon has been observed in international politics as the “perspective attribution tendency” (Sommer & Fuchs 2004): decisions made or actions taken by the own group (own party, own nation etc.) are explained differently than similar decisions and actions conducted by “the others”. Stated briefly, double standards are applied when reasoning about different nations’ nuclear programs; one’s own nuclear weapons are a necessity to protect the nation from the world’s dangers – the other nation, however, has the weapons because it wants to be omnipotent.
- The diagram “Vicious Circle” (see p. 23) describes mutual reproaches and conflicting actions of two persons (Schulz von Thun 2001), it can be adapted to the dilemma of disarmament and non-proliferation and help to understand the dynamics of the system, instead of searching for the main offender.
- The “Square of values” (Schulz von Thun 2001) (see p. 25) can be used to describe how nuclear weapons opponents and nuclear weapon proponents blame each other for thinking and acting wrongly and can help to reassess the reiteration of mutual reproaches, balancing opposing values and finding common grounds.

### 1.3 Determine elements of an effective dialogue with decision-makers

Thirdly, the thesis aimed at offering a supportive tool for NGOs working for peace and disarmament. Its attempt was to describe a possible way how to promote a dialogue of mutual understanding and respect that goes beyond common argument patterns and political positions – dialogue that avoids mutual reproaches, but also avoid superficial exchanges of empty diplomatic phrases, dialogue that gives a voice to human and emotional aspects. Such dialogue should be open and unbiased and is characterized by attentive and empathic listening, as well as

by asking open questions to explore underlying motives and to lay the ground for more challenging statements (see Chapter 4).

## 2. Systems of reasoning patterns

The system consists of four levels and several sub-categories and systematically organizes different ways of reasoning about nuclear weapons, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. On a thematic level, different positions, arguments and lines of reasoning can be systematized; on a contextual level, structural factors and regulations which indirectly influence the debate can be defined; on a personal level, personal priorities and attitudes, biographical memories, concrete worries and fears are subsumed. Finally, a social-cognitive level contains psychological phenomena such as information processing, perception of the other and perspective-taking.

### 1) THEMATIC LEVEL

#### 1a) Lines of argument

##### **Cognitive-functional reasoning**

A cognitive-functional way of reasoning about nuclear weapons refers – amongst other things – to the usability (e.g. to the ineffectiveness of nuclear deterrence in the light of “potential enemies” such as “terrorists”) and to financial aspects (e.g. claiming that the production and maintenance of nuclear weapons are expensive and waste financial resources that could be invested in education, health and social sectors).



A member of the youth delegation listens to a decision-maker during the NPT Review conference in May 2010.

## **Ethical or moral reasoning**

Another way of reasoning focuses on ethical or moral values such as legality, humanity and equality. Many decision-makers mentioned the incomparable devastation caused by nuclear weapons, mostly with reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the decision of the International Court of Justice from 1996.

## **Rational vs. visionary**

Thirdly, the statements from the interviews helped to define a dimension that contrasts a rational and a visionary approach. It refers to the tendency of some decision-makers to stress the need to think and act “rationally”, especially in the field of foreign affairs and security politics. This was mostly put in contrast to an “unreflective, naïve” answer to nuclear threats e.g. through unconditional disarmament. Decision-makers also referred to NGOs and described their visions and claims as “unrealistic” and “too emotional”. On the other side of this dimension, dialogue partners stressed the need to have visions in order find new solutions to old problems, referring amongst others to the work of NGOs and to the speech of the US president, Barack Obama in Prague, in April 2009.

## **1b) Good reasons for nuclear weapons**

### **Symbol of power and status**

Almost all interview partners mentioned the symbolic power of status that was associated with nuclear weapons; states with nuclear weapons were described as more influential within the international community. Many referred to the fact that all five officially acknowledged nuclear weapon states are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, that a nation would enjoy special respect by the international community thanks to its nuclear weapons (“Nations deal with Pakistan much more carefully because they know that the country has the weapon”) and that the possession of nuclear weapons would allow a state to blackmail others (“North Korea knows that their atomic bomb makes the world creeping and supplying economic help”).

### **Guarantee of security and stability**

Only one interviewee seriously thought about a possible use of the weapon to protect a nation or to restore security. (“If a madman, let’s say North Korea, launches a nuclear missile, then, I believe, we would only have one single possibility to stop them; by answering with a nuclear retaliation... There might be situations where suffering and death can be prevented by using nuclear weapons – especially if we think about the fact that it can be applied much more precisely than in earlier periods.”). Mostly, however, it was pointed out that nuclear weapons are not developed to be applied, but merely to deter the enemy (“For me, nuclear weapons have a stabilizing effect – assuming that the number of nuclear weapon states will stay the same, because they have proved that they act predictably... The threat of mutual assured destruction by nuclear weapons has a stabilizing effect – and in the light of humanity’s experience this is maybe a very realistic one....”)



### 1c) Risks and dangers of nuclear weapons

#### Proliferation (“in the hands of terrorists”)

The “pacifistic escalation theory” (Cohrs 2004) defines the phenomenon of proliferation as a cognitive-functional argument against weapons and the use of violence. Proliferation was described as one of the main risks of nuclear weapons in most of the interviews. Mostly, however, this line of reasoning claimed not the phenomena of proliferation itself, but rather referred to potential “irrational” and “unpredictable” possessors such as terrorists and leaders of unstable states. Not proliferation but the supposed intention and characteristics of an adversarial actor is perceived as the main threat. In this way, a “pacifistic” argument carries the risk to create an enemy image: only “in the hands of certain people which are unpredictable and irrational and which mean to kill as many people as possible” do nuclear weapons turn into a real object of danger.

#### Structural inequality (“haves and have-nots”)

Another approach claims the mere existence of the weapons and the unequal distribution as the main risk and therefore incompatible with any peace politic. “Nuclear weapons are not only a means of deterrence and of the possible destruction of all life, they are also incompatible with any stable peace politic, with human sense of community and moral civilisation, incompatible with political constitutions, with democracy’s future” (Scheer 1986).

## 2) CONTEXTUAL LEVEL

### 2a) Perceived relevance of the topic

The importance of nuclear disarmament is perceived differently by political actors; this can be shown with statements referring the remaining US atomic bombs on Germany’s soil. “This is one of the greatest and deepest controversies in foreign politics between us and the governing parties”, says one politician. “This is a debate between only a few professionals”, “(...) a lyric topic, we can talk about it, but it will not have an effect anyway”, explain representatives from conservative parties.

### 2b) Perceived public interest

The public interest in nuclear disarmament and over all, its competency to contribute to this discussion, was assessed differently. One interview partner mentioned the lack of knowledge about current threats (e.g. the Iranian nuclear program) and the difficulty to get reliable information and communicate it to the wider public. A government’s representative explains, that “nuclear disarmament” is a topic difficult to discuss in public because most of the people would agree to abolish all nuclear weapons as quickly as possible – a neutral and rational debate, including considerations in favour of the nuclear weapons, should – but would not – be possible. Others described the role of civil society and NGOs as

essential because they bring the issue of disarmament repeatedly into the focus of the political agenda.

## **2c) Contracts, obligations and political procedures**

Political agendas, political orientation and proximity to the government seem to influence decision-making about war, military operations and disarmament much more than moral and ethical considerations (Fuchs 1998). Several statements from the interviews support these observations. Motions calling for the withdrawal of the US atomic weapons from Germany were rejected by the governing parties with the reason that they have the obligation to reject every motion from opposing parties according to the coalition agreements. Some members from governing parties additionally draw a general conclusion about the motions from the opposition, calling them unrealistic and too ambitious in any respect.

## **3) PERSONAL LEVEL**

### **3a) Personal associations and memories**

“Pictures of devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused by US atomic bombs in 1945; memories of own military service in Germany during Cold War; participation at demonstrations against nuclear armament of NATO and deployment of nuclear missiles in 1980ies; memories about the accident of the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in 1986...”

### **3b) Reasons for taking on the current position**

“Early ambition to be engaged in foreign politics and disarmament; pragmatic necessity to take over the position of a colleague...”

### **3c) Emotions, worries and fears**

“Sees hopeful signs in nuclear disarmament process and believes in Global Zero; doubts that the peaceful era in Europe will last forever; has concrete fears about a nuclear attack in the Middle East; worries about Iran and its ambitions...”

## **4) SOCIO-CONGNITIVE LEVEL**

### **4a) Dealing with complexity**

The issue of nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament is characterized by complexity and controversy. Therefore, a systematization of the different aspects can help to prepare dialogues with decision-makers. But how do political actors and decision-makers themselves deal with this complexity and in some cases, with uncertainty and lack of knowledge? One strategy used by almost every person talking about this complex issue is “simplification” of facts and circumstances. In this way, complex interactions that involve a number of actors and processes are

described in simple, linear relations of cause-and-effect: “Pakistan has the weapon because India has them. North Korea is a special case; they are in conflict with the rest of the world anyway. Israel simply wants to deter with the weapon feeling threatened by its neighbours...” Another effect of simplification is that people – human beings – are put in the rear: “Nuclear weapons were developed during World War II and their deployment in Japan brought the War to an end.” Where are the actors, the ones that died and suffered? Of course, communication about nuclear weapons – and about any other issue – would not be possible without reducing complexity. However, simplification of international phenomena, problems and conflicts can lead to a thinking in categories of “friend and foes”, “us vs. them” (Sommer & Fuchs 2004). Therefore, the dialogue should be conducted within a framework that offers enough time to reflect and question statements. In this way, assumptions and links could be questioned, lack of knowledge could be admitted, and humility could be shown considering the complexity of the issue.

#### **4b) Perspective attribution tendency and antagonism**

In social psychology, the “fundamental attribution error” has been described as the tendency to overweight internal traits such as personality and character when reasoning about the behaviour of others, neglecting circumstances and external restraints. Sommer & Fuchs (2004) describe a similar phenomenon when people talk about national security and call it “perspective attribution tendency”. This attribution bias leads to an antagonistic way of thinking which is characterized by polarization between “us and them”, blaming others for doing harm and attributing negative traits to them (Rothman 1997). In this sense, a parliamentarian stated: “As long as nuclear weapons exist in this world, it is reasonable to have them too – or at least to be protected by a nuclear umbrella.” Later the same politician said: “Countries which want to achieve nuclear weapons may be governed by leaders that are craving power and glory.”

#### **4c) Empathic perspective-taking and self-criticism**

In contrast to the above described antagonistic way of perceiving the world, Rothman (1997) defines a “resonant” attitude which takes a more reflective and meta-perspective approach and is characterized by self-critical analysis of one’s own role and responsibilities. Here, the dialogue partners try to analyse and understand the other’s reasons and motives and reflect their own contribution to the problem. This helps to establish an atmosphere of “we are in this together”. In this sense, a German politician stated: “Germany does not have own nuclear weapons, but still plays an important role in the disarmament process and has to be active in this field (...) Specially when we look back to Germany’s past we see the responsibility to contribute our part.”

## How to use the system of reasoning patterns?

The “system of reasoning patterns” can be used by NGOs and civil organisations working for nuclear disarmament when preparing for a dialogue with political decision-makers. It thereby can raise awareness about different aspects that might be crucial to consider in the dialogue and can help

- to organize the complexity of the issue
- to get familiar with common argument patterns
- to systematize the contextual factors such as the political system, legal frameworks and decision-making procedures
- to raise awareness about the individuality of personal approaches and attitudes
- to get acquainted with certain psychological phenomena in the field of information-processing and reasoning about others

## 3. Application of findings from psychological research to nuclear disarmament

**“The use of these weapons will always be hypothetical, but their political effect is real.”**

**Herman Scheer**

### 3.1. Direct vs. structural violence and the question about the “why”

#### The tendency to overlook structures

When asked about spontaneous associations, about the difference between nuclear and conventional weapons and about the risks and dangers of nuclear weapons, decision-makers mostly referred to the incomparable potential of these weapons to kill, to destroy and to threaten and mentioned the danger of a possible use. This has led to the interpretation that discussions about nuclear weapons are primarily characterized by a thinking in “categories of applicability”: it mostly refers to the possible use and therefore to the “obvious” danger and “direct” violence. The aspect of structural violence, namely the “ambivalent” attitude of nuclear states (claiming control and sanction of proliferation while not sticking to the commitment to engage into disarmament discussion) were rarely mentioned in first place, if mentioned at all, and seem to be considered as minor when arguing about nuclear weapons.

In this connection, Galtung et al. (2003) allege that politicians and journalists often tend to focus on direct violence and ignore underlying unresolved conflicts and polarisations. “They confuse the conflict area where violence and action happens with the conflict formation that encompasses all parties having an interest in the result [...] they oversee structural conflicts”. Scheer (1986) has always warned that such a “thinking in categories of applicability” bears the risk of overlooking structural factors and claims to be aware of the devastating political effect of nuclear weapons, explaining that “the use of these weapons will always be hypothetical, but their political effect is real.”

An ethical or moral reasoning often refers to the possible use of nuclear weapons and to the horrible consequences of a nuclear attack. This reasoning will likely be supported by decision-makers, arguing “that a nuclear war must be prevented by any means and we are working hard for that with a responsible nuclear weapons policy”. Arguments that focus on the “direct” violence of nuclear weapons could lead to a circular reasoning and reinforce military mindsets that perceive nuclear weapons as means of protection. Additionally, it could reinforce an antagonistic thinking that distinguishes between “bad” and “good” weapons, depending on the possessors of the weapons. To conclude, focussing on devastation of a nuclear war might not always be helpful to move forward and find new solutions. What would be another, more efficient way to break out of this circular reasoning?

### Asking about the “why” reveals structural violence

It could be shown in the interviews that questions about the “good reasons” of nuclear weapons and the question about “why” a nation might want to possess them, often brought up aspects of structural inequalities. The question about the “why” could help to enlarge the dialogue by asking “deeper” in order to “identify underlying assumptions” as proposed by the Oxford Research Group, an anti-nuclear think-tank based in London (see Part III). Asking about the underlying motives has been pointed out to be crucial for conflict management (Rothman 1997). “Why do you care so much? Why is it important for you?” are questions, Rothman asks his conflict parties when exploring possible roots and ways out of a perpetuating conflict. In a similar sense, the question about the “why” could help to “get deeper” into the sensitivities of nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament.

#### **Conclusion: Explore structural violence by asking about the “why”**

Always have in mind the “whole picture”: the actual threats and dangers as well as the existing structural dynamics of the “conflict formation” with all relevant actors. Asking about underlying motives – the “why” – can help to “get behind the way of thinking that created the problem” and to bring up structural dynamics that are equal important to bethink but often overlooked when focussing on actual threats and obvious dangers.

### 3.2. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation – an identity conflict?

When asked about the “good reasons” for nuclear weapons, most interview partners referred to their function as a nation’s status symbol, explaining that a country with nuclear weapons enjoys more respect and influence within the international community. Additional reasons mentioned were the (perceived) protection and security provided by nuclear weapons. “Power”, “Status” and “Security” play an important role in the nuclear disarmament discourse which therefore could be described as an “identity conflict”. Rothman (1997) defines an “identity conflict” as a conflict that involves deep, collective needs such as dignity, recognition and security. In consequence, identity conflicts need to be managed

differently than a conflict over resources (land, oil, money etc.) or over interests (participation on market, use of infrastructure etc.). An identity conflict, however, mostly appears as a conventional conflict about resources or interests because identity factors are not explicitly expressed and difficult to grasp for the conflict parties. In the field of nuclear weapons and nuclear power, the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the basis of the worldwide distribution of nuclear resources and additionally encompasses interests such as the containment of the worldwide possession of nuclear weapons and the regulation of nuclear energy supply. As the nuclear weapons states have not yet accomplished their duty to eliminate their nuclear arsenals, the unequal distribution of nuclear material endures – a constellation that risks raising the questions about dignity and prestige. In other words, it is no longer a question of “having or not having” the bomb, but a question of “being allowed and recognized” to have it. As a representative of the government explained in the interview: “Many states think that the possession of nuclear weapons is an advantage for international relations and brings them in a more privileged category (...). I think some states fear a status-minus as a consequence of their disarmament efforts.”

Rothman and Olson (2001) explain, referring to the well-known conflict researcher Herbert Kelman, that when identity factors are involved, conflicts over interests and resources can only be solved if these identity factors were properly addressed in first place. Applied to the field of nuclear disarmament, this means that real steps towards “Global Zero” only can be accomplished if structural conditions and inequalities are expressed and included in negotiations. This could include fears and worries about national security, the fact that all nuclear states are permanent members of the UN Security Council, and the double standard applied when reacting to nation’s nuclear programs.

## **Conclusion: Recognize identity factors of nuclear disarmament discourse**

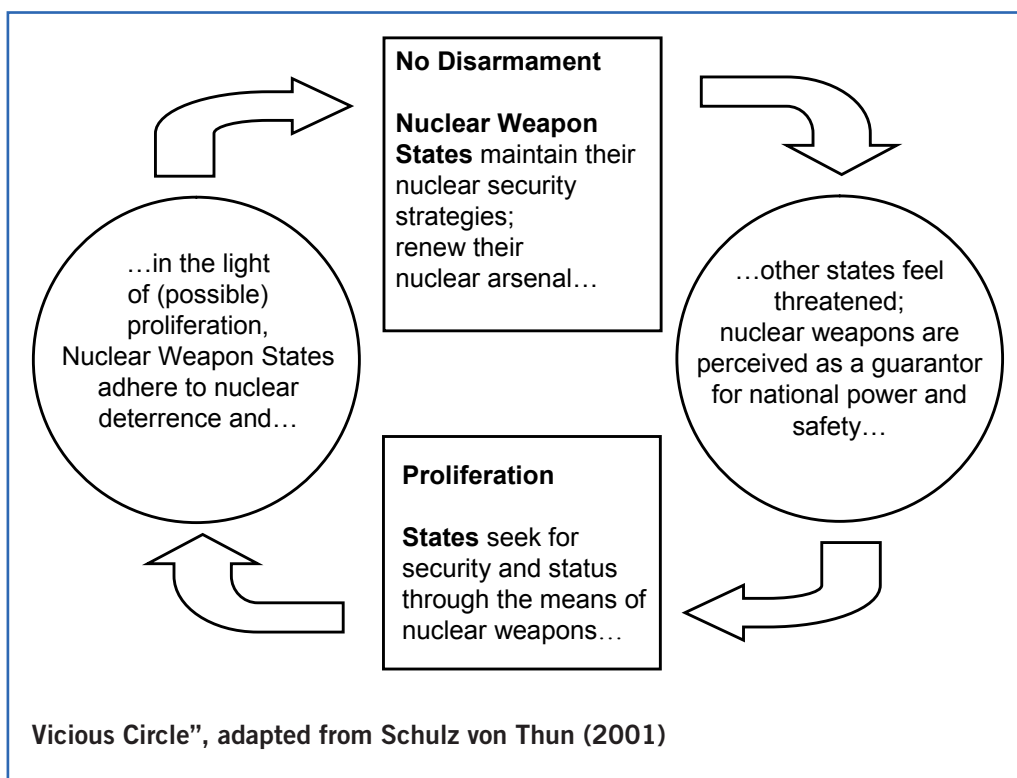
If a conflict threatens identity factors of the conflict parties such as security, dignity and pride, a conflict can rarely be solved without these factors being explicitly mentioned and heard by the other parties.

### **3.3 The dilemma of disarmament and non-proliferation – a “vicious circle”**

A dilemma can be defined as an advantage that is enjoyed by only one person or one group - at the charge of the entire system (Sommer & Fuchs 2004). Security politics and international relations are often confronted with dilemmas. In regard to the nuclear disarmament process, the dilemma can be summarized in the question “Where to start? Stopping proliferation first in order to set the ground for disarmament - or disarming first in order to make proliferation obsolete?” One interview partner explains: “Mutual deterrence has to be seen as a last resort of security measures that our society can not be satisfied with. Therefore we have to abandon this logic of security. But the solution can not be that those countries that have the means and capacity (of deterrence) resign from these capacities in first place – without considering the other, instable states that are not integrated in the system of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and which could use aggres-

sive means...this is the dilemma.” So, where to start then? Where else can the solution be found?

Another dilemma refers to the often criticized ineffectiveness of the NPT, which could be seen in the phenomenon of proliferation. (“Each state that acquires nuclear weapons will be followed by another one that wants to acquire them too, either to feel safe or to play in the same league”). Mostly, representatives of nuclear weapon states argue like this, seeing proliferation as the higher risk. On the other side, the non-compliance of the nuclear weapon states with Article VI of the NPT can be described as the main obstacle. (“The credibility of NPT is jeopardized because nuclear weapon states do not engage in disarmament negotiations”). Who carries the burden of responsibility? Who is to blame? Instead of lurching for the main offender, the dynamics and systemic of the whole situation should be illuminated:



This graph shows – in a very simplified form – the dynamics of a system in which actors perceive each other (circles) and react towards each other (squares). This graph helps to go beyond a linear way of thinking in oversimplified cause-and-effect-associations. It is a model that is used in systemic psychotherapy to show that causes of communication failures or psychological disorders are not primarily found in an individual’s personality or behaviour but is rather the outcome of the malfunction of the whole system (e.g. the family, the enterprise etc.). This systemic approach could be applied to international relations in order to analyse and understand the obstacles and intractability of nuclear disarmament negotiations from a meta-perspective.



**Conclusion: Analyse dynamics of the system instead of searching for main offender**

A systemic approach can help to analyse the dynamics of the conflict formation - instead of searching for the main offender that is to be blamed. This helps to see the conflict from a meta-perspective and creates an atmosphere of “we are in this together”.

**3.4 “Us vs. them”– the Perspective Attribution Tendency**

The perspective attribution tendency – the tendency to apply double standards when reasoning about the own and the other’s nuclear programs – should be addressed and challenged during the dialogue. Dialogue partners should be aware of this psychological phenomenon of information-processing, exploring it by asking strategic questions or maybe even by briefly explaining it. This could help to overcome antagonistic thinking between “us and them” and foster a more empathic perspective-taking – the attempt to understand the motives and reasons of the other side, instead of blaming it to be the only offender. At the same time, some kind of self-criticism could be generated by focusing more on one’s own responsibility.

One conclusion from the interviews is that in political discussions, perspective taking is often done in a strategic rather than an empathic way. Often, possible motives of the other side are briefly mentioned and a form of intellectual understanding is expressed – quickly followed by statements that support one’s own position and re-establishes polarisation. A more empathic perspective-taking in the sense of resonance as described by Rothman (1997) has another quality, it takes a more reflective and meta-perspective approach and is characterized by self-critical analysis of the own role and responsibility. The framework of a dialogue should therefore allow the opposing parties to pronounce their opinions, their worries and values, whereas the other side endeavours to listen openly and understand, before uttering their own perspective. This approach helps to establish an atmosphere of “we are in this together” – however, this needs time and commitment, hard to fit into the agenda of political decision-makers!

**Conclusion: Challenge perspective attribution tendency**

The social psychological phenomenon of “fundamental attribution error” – adapted to the field of international relations known as “perspective attribution tendency” – could be explicitly mentioned during the dialogue, this could help to induce a reconsidering of the debate from a meta-perspective. Additionally, it could foster a self-critical reflection of the own way of arguing for all participating parties.



### 3.5 “Square of values” - face common controversies from a new perspective

The following dialogue illustrates – in a very simplified form – the common argument patterns between nuclear weapon opponents (A) and proponents (B). Each of these arguments was mentioned in the interviews (and has been slightly adapted for the imaginary dialogue).

A: Nuclear weapons are immoral and illegal because they destroy and kill without any difference.

B: Nuclear weapons will not be used, they have a political function. They guarantee national security, stability and peace. It is their existence alone that protects the country from enemies.

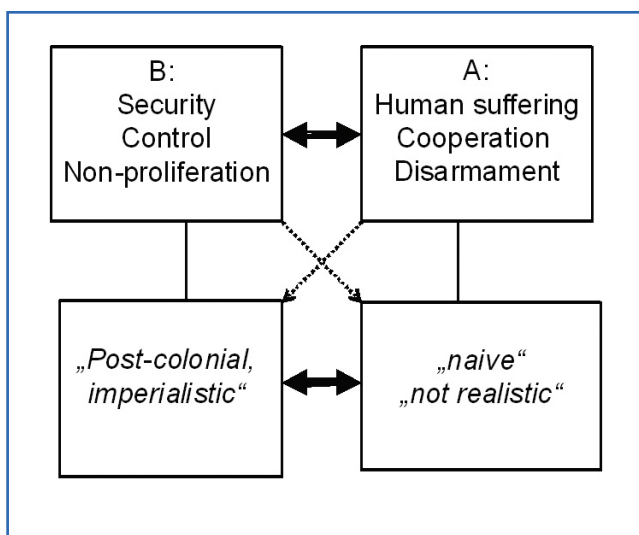
A: There are enough nuclear weapons in this world to destroy our entire planet. If just one bomb explodes accidentally – the consequences and human suffering would be horrid.

B: That is why we have to prevent unstable states from using their weapons. Weapons of democracies are not the problem; they will never be used – in the first place or against states without nuclear weapons.

A: This is a double standard! This is post-colonial thinking! All nations should immediately and unconditionally abolish their nuclear weapons.

B: How naïve! Stable democracies should give up their weapons? We have to be realistic here – first, proliferation of nuclear weapons has to be prevented.

To describe the opposing constellation between A and B, we can use the „Square of values“ (Schulz von Thun 2001), it is a mental tool that helps to understand dynamics and constellations of conflicts and to design adequate interventions, mainly used in the field of psychological counselling and therapy. Similarly, the model can help to better understand common argument patterns between nuclear weapons opponents and proponents: B highly values security, control and prevention of non-proliferation, whereas A worries more about human consequences of nuclear weapons, values cooperation and trust building and promotes mutual steps toward disarmament. A and B both present aspects of the “whole picture” (arrow between upper squares), however, they do not recognize each



„Square of Values“, adapted from Schulz von Thun (2001)

other's worries, they don't listen to each other's arguments, and they don't want to find out more about the motives and reasons of the other's perspective. By doing so, however, they could maybe find common ground, but instead, A is blaming B for a post-colonial and imperialistic thinking and B is blaming A for being naïve and not realistic (dotted arrows). In this way, the relationship between A and B is mainly located in the lower, negative part of the model, perpetuating mutual reproaches (arrow between lower squares). Wouldn't it be helpful to combine the opposing values (in the upper squares) – caution and bravery, control and trust – in order to find a balance between a deliberate considering of the existing dangers and a brave and visionary approach that increases the likelihood to find new solutions to old problems and new ways out of an ongoing back-and-forth of reproaches?

## **Conclusion: Recognize the positive aspects of the other's values**

The square of values can be used to analyse the position of the opposing party and find out more about its values. Instead of blaming the other for having the "wrong" approach, it could be searched for potential positive aspects in the other's arguments.

**"If we had the word,  
if we had the lan-  
guage, we would  
not need the  
weapons."**

**Ingeborg Bachmann**

## **4. Conclusions: Elements of an effective dialogue**

Like most other topics on the political agenda, the discussion about nuclear disarmament is primarily shaped by a rational and tactical negotiation style; decision-makers have a more "occupational" approach to the issue and work with the credo to "think and act strategically and rationally". Ethical, moral and humanitarian aspects mostly do play a minor role in the security discourse, whereas structures, rules and procedures of the political system as well as personal associations, priorities and assumptions tend to influence the debate. In this sense, nuclear weapons can soberly be described as a "lyrical topic" or as "a part of my daily work". The balancing of assets and drawbacks can lead to a neutral and sober thinking about nuclear disarmament; nuclear weapons are seen as a bargaining chip in international relations, useful to gain advantages in other fields of international cooperation. All this leads to the fact that the humanitarian aspect and human suffering risks being neglected in talks about nuclear weapons. "What gets left out of dominant ways of thinking about weapons – the emotional, the concrete, the particular, the human bodies and their vulnerability, human lives and their subjectivity" (Cohn & Ruddick 2003). Therefore the recollection of concrete and human aspects and higher values seems to be important to move nuclear disarmament forward. This human aspect is mainly brought into the discussion by opposing parties, by civil society movements, by NGOs, by IPPNW. Often, these voices are kindly acknowledged by decision-makers to then be diminished and called too emotional, not logical, not rational and inadequate for foreign politics. Therefore, the crucial question to ask is: How could the "human voice" be brought into the debate and taken seriously by those who work in an environment that is characterized by fragmental and rational reasoning? How can ethic-moral aspects of humanity be brought into the structures of military mind-

sets and security politics? The following conclusion tries to give an answer to these questions by outlining elements of an effective dialogue that goes beyond common argument patterns, mutual reproaches and empty diplomatic phrases but instead enables “real” communication and a balance between empathic listening and critical challenging of mindsets.

**“Real communication”: ask openly, listen attentively, understand empathically and challenge mindsets without confronting**

A dialogue should be embedded in a personal and trustful atmosphere – an atmosphere which allows the parties to ask open question and to listening attentively to each other, without valuing and with the attempt to “really” understand. In psychological settings such as therapy or counselling, the role of “attentive listening” has been described as a crucial one (superior to the advice and counsel given by the psychologist!). Maybe the asset of listening can have a comparably positive effect in discussions with political decision-makers – especially when assuming that such an open attitude induces a similar openness and willingness to listen and understand on the other side. It is assumed that an open and facing attitude towards the other initiates a process of reconsidering or even change existing mindsets – rather than this could be done by a harsh confrontation with ethic-moral arguments. An attentive listening contains two more advantages: we are more likely to find links and potential starting points to introduce the own concerns in such a way that they will not be rejected. Secondly, we gain valuable insight into the other’s ways of reasoning – an optimal preparation for future dialogues with decision-makers.

Let’s imagine a dialogue where no time is given to ask and to listen, where dialogue partners would confront each other with opinions and would not try to understand each other’s reasons – it could be a dialogue between ambitious representatives from an NGO and military decision-makers which highly value the role of weapons and nuclear deterrence for national security. How might a decision-maker react to the “attacking” statement that nuclear weapons – their highly valued means of safety – were immoral and against humanity? Wouldn’t it provoke a sort of “defence”? Wouldn’t the “menacing” description of death and injury provoke “protection” and urge the decision-maker to explain that a nuclear explosion by the enemy had to be prevented? “Attacking and defending”, “menacing and protecting” should not be the tools of a dialogue about nuclear disarmament. The dialogue should be understood as a vivid example of a new and constructive way of interacting and exchanging thoughts, fears, angers and wishes.

To conclude, asking open questions, asking about the “why” and listening attentively is crucial to establish a fruitful and effective dialogue. Asking open questions and listening attentive can help:

- to enable an open and unbiased dialogue
- to enlarge the focus of the dialogue and go beyond common argument patterns

- to create a more personal dialogue and bring in a “human voice”
- to lay the ground for controversial and challenging questions and statements
- to find out more about the others, but also about own assumptions and attitudes

**Sarah's thesis can be downloaded at: [www.znf.uni-hamburg.de/diplomKoch.pdf](http://www.znf.uni-hamburg.de/diplomKoch.pdf).**

During my interviews, I could observe how the atmosphere changed and became more relaxed when I asked a personal question – for example about memories or concrete fears – and listened openly, eager to learn more about the other's perspective. It helped to create an atmosphere of trust and therefore laid the ground to bring in more controversial aspects and confront the decision-makers with challenging questions. Once a personal and trustful atmosphere is established, the dialogue continues to be an act of balance in two senses: A balance between a confident advocacy for one's own position, ideals and vision on one side, and the attempt to empathically understand the other side. A second balance should be found between a confident, self-assured advocacy and the willingness to once in a while critically reconsider and question one's own positions and attitudes. This could create an open and unbiased dialogue that moves the hearts of all participants and motivates them to go beyond the common reasoning patterns and mutual approaches, but searching common ground to work for nuclear disarmament.



Last preparations for the simulation game in Geneva, 2008

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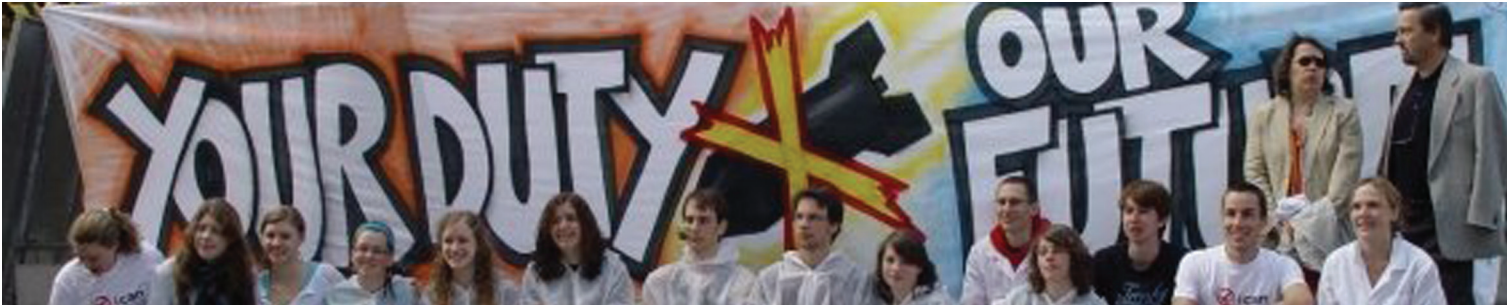
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# III. dialogue on nuclear disarmament

Inga Blum



Inga Blum

**"I believe that a profound understanding of the psychological reasons for nuclear weapons is indispensable not only for successful dialogue but ultimately to achieve our goal of the abolition of nuclear weapons"**

## Dialogue on nuclear weapons with students and decision-makers

### 1. Why dialogue?

IPPNW became what it is today by informing decision-makers and the public about the medical consequences of nuclear weapons, by showing that these are not strategic instruments but weapons of genocide. During the cold war the IPPNW founders Dr. Evgenij Chazov and Dr. Bernard Lown, and many other like-minded doctors, conducted dialogue with political decision-makers that contributed to ending the nuclear arms race.

But their achievements are not the only reason that I am convinced of the potential of dialogue for nuclear disarmament. It is also due to my experience from taking part in the IPPNW student and doctor's dialogue on nuclear weapons that I became convinced that dialogue can lead to real change. In the following pages I will try to show how my experience has led me to seek the psychological causes of nuclear weapons, and why I believe that a profound understanding of the psychological reasons for nuclear weapons is indispensable not only for successful dialogue but ultimately to achieve our goal of the abolition of nuclear weapons.

My search for the psychological causes of nuclear weapons was the inspiration for Sarah Koch's thesis in Psychology that is presented in this booklet. I am deeply impressed by her thorough research and precise description of the way decision-makers often talk about nuclear weapons. Knowing about the systems of decision-makers' reasoning patterns, that she has discovered, can be very helpful for the preparation of future IPPNW dialogue meetings. The findings from psychology research that she has applied to the conflict about nuclear weapons demonstrate plausibly to what extent this conflict actually relies on psychology. This in turn helps us to understand the obstacles to nuclear disarmament, and provides us with strong arguments to undermine myths like, for instance, that deterrence in the cold war was based on rational thinking.

### 2. Changing minds through student dialogue

When I was a medical student I thought at first that the debate about nuclear weapons was old fashioned and futile. But because of my interest in the social and political aspects of medicine I became a member of IPPNW and ended up becoming actively involved in the student-run Nuclear Weapons Inheritance Project (NWIP). As part of the project we educated ourselves on nuclear weapons and organised meetings to dialogue with students from various countries, particularly from states in possession of nuclear weapons.

At the beginning of a NWIP dialogue, most of the participants usually said that nuclear weapons were not really relevant to their lives. Others, especially from China and Russia, would even express support for their country's possession of nuclear weapons. When asked why they thought this, their replies were nearly



always predictable, like: "I don't care about nuclear weapons because there are many more important issues like poverty that we should care more about" or "We only need nuclear weapons to defend ourselves from nuclear attack by other countries." We respectfully acknowledged these arguments and tried to challenge them with thought-provoking questions. For instance, if they thought that there were more important social issues to care about than nuclear weapons, then we asked them what they thought about the costs of nuclear weapons, as compared to the cost of eliminating poverty. In this way, we began a non-confrontational dialogue.

By "non-confrontational dialogue" we meant that everyone should be encouraged to freely express his or her opinion without criticism, and that we should not try to force our own opinions on them, instead challenging their arguments through questions. We were surprised to hear a limited number of pro nuclear weapons arguments repeatedly being brought up in each dialogue meeting. This allowed us to prepare questions to specifically challenge these arguments. At the end of a meeting the dialoguers mostly thought that nuclear weapons did matter after all and expressed a much more critical view of their country's nuclear weapons than before. It was encouraging to witness how others arrived, step by step, at the same conclusion that I also had done, namely, that nuclear disarmament is a logical necessity. Dialogue like this was something that I had not experienced before, not at school, at university or during political discussions with my friends in which controversial opinions were usually exchanged more like in a debate where the mindset seemed rather to get more fixed than to change.

### 3. Dare to be naive

Motivated by these experiences, I started to take part in the IPPNW Dialogue with Decision-Makers (DWD) programme in which IPPNW doctors meet with politicians or diplomats to lobby for nuclear disarmament. These meetings were very different those of the student dialogue. Changes of mind were not visible and decision-makers hardly ever made concrete concessions for nuclear abolition. Although this was not unexpected for me, I was still disappointed because I was so convinced of the urgent necessity of nuclear disarmament and I was at a loss to see how others could not understand this.

Didn't they know how many nuclear weapons there are and what the consequences of their use would be?

During the dialogues with decision-makers I often observed that politicians are indeed aware of what a humanitarian catastrophe a nuclear explosion would be (or at least they say they are), but they still do not make the link to their own nuclear weapons. On the contrary, sometimes they even argue that their nuclear weapons are necessary to prevent a nuclear war.

For this reason I felt the need to move beyond the IPPNW policy of merely informing decision-makers about the medical consequences of nuclear weapons and to start using some psychological skills in order to urge politicians to begin to understand, step by step, why we believe that the only way to prevent nuclear war is complete global disarmament. Sometimes the opinion was expressed that we should not discuss nuclear policy and strategy as we are doctors and not political experts. But I think that even so, we do understand the core of the problem:

- Nuclear weapons must never be used.
- As long as there are nuclear weapons they are at risk of being used, and therefore have to be abolished.
- The likelihood of their use increases in proportion to their number and to the number of actors who possess them:
- One of the most important reasons for states to have or to aspire to have nuclear weapons is that other states have them or aspire to have them (concept of deterrence).
- Therefore, there will be proliferation as long as there are nuclear weapons and the only way to stop proliferation is complete nuclear disarmament.

Our strength is not to ape political experts, but to act as doctors, allowing us to ask essential questions and to provide decision-makers, who are often stuck in the limitations of daily political life, a different perspective and remind them of their responsibility. We know more about the effects of nuclear weapons on health, for example, the effects of radiation on the human body. But beyond this, an important skill for a doctor is empathy, the ability to identify oneself mentally with (and so fully comprehend) patients, their emotions and motivation. We should use that skill to understand the motivation of decision-makers to support nuclear weapons.



Students preparing a dialogue in Geneva, 2008

## 4. Strategic questions

Sometimes a dialogue gets bogged down in technical details, we lose the thread of what we really wanted to discuss or we can't overcome disagreement over a certain point. For such situations, I have developed questions that could lead the dialogue in a certain direction, provoke thoughts and/or give insights into the decision-makers assumptions and beliefs. I tried some of these on a number of occasions.

An example: During a dialogue in Pakistan the discussion was stuck on the issue of how many nuclear-capable aircraft carriers Pakistan had in comparison to India. None of us knew much about this issue. At an apt moment, I politely asked our political counterpart whether I could ask him a different question. He agreed, and so I asked him how many nuclear weapons he thought there would be in the world a hundred years from now. He was taken aback by the question and replied that he had never thought about it. When I asked him to just guess he said that he really had no idea and did not want to discuss this question. The intention of my question had been to draw the discussion away from details to another, larger level. By implicitly asking about the long-term consequences of current nuclear policies, a moral-ethical level is attained, where the risks of and reasons for proliferation can be discussed. Although he could not or did not want to move to that level, I found it significant how his thoughts about nuclear weapons were so fixed on the actual political situation.

Another example: At the end of a DWDM meeting at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, I asked one of the NATO officials whether he thought that NATO nuclear weapons and, especially, the NATO policy of nuclear sharing might be a motivation for others to also acquire nuclear weapons for security reasons. He said that he had never heard of a country that had justified its nuclear weapons aspirations with the Nuclear Weapon States' failure to disarm. So I suggested that India was just such a state, which had been a constant advocate of nuclear disarmament and who had often criticised the NPT as being discriminatory, prior to becoming a nuclear weapon state itself. He said that this was an interesting point, however, he said, in his opinion, the only way to prevent proliferation and to guarantee peace is the existence of a strong and controlling hand that, in today's world, happened to be NATO with its nuclear policy. I found it very important to get him to spell out this assumption so clearly, although unfortunately it was only in the final minutes of the meeting. When I challenged his statement we got into a philosophical discussion on human nature for the last few minutes.

It might seem obvious to us that NATO officials think like that, but as long as they do I think it doesn't make much sense to tell them about the dimensions of a nuclear war. With this mindset they might see it as only another argument for why NATO should remain so strong.

Here are some further questions that I have developed for various purposes:

If you want to shift the discussion to a bigger perspective and identify hidden assumptions you might ask:

- Do you think it is more likely that a country would be subjected to nuclear attack if it has nuclear weapons or if it does not have nuclear weapons? Why?
- How likely do you think it is that a nuclear weapon will be used within the next 100 years?

If you want to challenge the argument that there are responsible and irresponsible nuclear weapon states, you might ask:

- When looking at history, do you think 65 years is a sufficient observation period to be sure that “responsible” states will stay stable for the next few hundred years?

If the decision-maker is responding to each of your proposals for disarmament by saying, no, it is too soon to think about ideas for nuclear disarmament, you might ask:

- What do you imagine is a realistic timeframe for [or to think about] nuclear disarmament and what would be the first steps?

Or if you want to challenge the concept of deterrence:

- Do you think the world would be safer if all countries were under a nuclear umbrella like the NATO countries? For example, should China provide a nuclear umbrella for East Asia?

These are just a few ideas, there are many more possibilities. Of course it depends on the situation and on the decision-maker, which question is the right one and whether or when it is appropriate to ask it. It also depends on the background of the person who asks, probably it is easier for me as a young woman to ask a naïve sounding question than for someone who is older and more experienced. To avoid sounding polemical it is important to phrase the question respectfully and with an honest interest.



Wolfgang Schlupp-Hauck (r.)  
from Mutlangen in dialogue  
with German MP  
Roderich Kiesewetter.

## 5. The Oxford Research Group dialogue method

Since 1982 the Oxford Research Group (ORG), a London-based anti-nuclear think/action-tank, has developed and applied a method for dialogue on nuclear disarmament with decision-makers. This method is the theoretical foundation for the NWIP student dialogue programme. IPPNW doctors adapted the method for their dialogue in the 1990ies, although there has recently been a lack of clarity within IPPNW as to what the method is about and whether it is appropriate for the IPPNW dialogue with decision-makers. Personally, I am very fond of the method and it has helped to guide me during dialogue with students and in developing the questions that I have described in the previous chapter. The ORG booklet “Everyone’s Guide to Achieving Change- A step by step approach to dialogue with decision-makers” outlines the main principles:

- getting to the core of the problem;
- being aware of assumptions;
- non-confrontational communication.

**Getting to the core of the problem** means clearly identifying and directly addressing the main area of disagreement. In my view, being direct in a respectful way often helps to increase the efficacy of a discussion and makes it more interesting. My experience was that I was at first too concerned about being perceived as offensive by asking a direct question. In fact, the reactions turned out to be predominantly positive. Decision-makers often felt positively challenged and the discussion got more lively and exciting. Their reactions became much less predictable than I had expected. Perhaps the concern about offending decision-makers with a direct question comes from an assumption that they won’t be able to answer and that they will feel cornered and get upset. When I feel that concern, I remind myself that they probably have indeed thought about the issue and that they have their own system of reasoning which is sound and valid to them. That is what I want to explore with my question.

**Being aware of assumptions** is important because some conflicts can’t be solved without understanding underlying beliefs. For example, the assumption “peace requires a strong hand to control and to sanction,” that the NATO official expressed, could explain why he was so reluctant during the whole dialogue to support our proposals to withdraw NATO nuclear weapons from Europe, and to end nuclear sharing. This suggests he has a deeply rooted belief about human nature that might not be easy to change. But if we want to succeed, we probably have no other choice than to address this.

The Oxford Research Group believes that all change begins at the level of the individual and that “planting seeds of doubt” is an effective tool for change. Even if you don’t see a change of mind immediately, it is likely that a sound argument that is presented in a respectful way will leave an impression which stays with the person, or even grows subconsciously until its time has come.



**Non-confrontational communication** is sometimes mistaken for avoidance, just being nice and therefore remaining ineffective. But it should not mean that one avoids the core of a problem. Instead, the atmosphere for a true exchange of thoughts should be created:

- Carefully listen to and try to understand the other;
- Identify areas of agreement and establish common ground;
- Avoid accusatory or demanding language when addressing areas of disagreement or phrasing a request;
- Try to resolve a conflict by proceeding logically and step by step instead of quickly drawing back into fundamental positions from where there is no possibility to reach the other;
- Be ready to challenge your own assumptions if need be, otherwise you can't expect the other side to also be open for change.

**The ORG booklet  
“Everyone's Guide for  
Achieving Change - a  
step-by-step approach  
for dialogue with  
decision-makers” by the  
Oxford Research Group  
can be ordered at [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk).**

The ORG method is inspired by techniques for non-confrontational dialogue in groups that the US philosopher and physicist David Bohm developed. Today, these are used by companies and organisations for strategic decisions or to optimise process. Another advocate of dialogue was Socrates, who described dialogue as a multilevel process of questions, answers and logical reasoning, in order to gain knowledge.

The first edition of the ORG booklet “Everyones Guide for Achieving Change - a step-by-step approach for dialogue with decision-makers” by the Oxford Research Group was written by Scilla Elworthy and John Hamwee in 1999. The current 2007 edition was edited by Janet Bloomfield and Rosie Houldsworth. The programme developed by the ORG was followed on by TalkWorks, a project run by Rosie Houldsworth ([www.talkworks.info](http://www.talkworks.info)).

## 6. Evaluation of IPPNW dialogue meetings

Inspired by the powerful student dialogue and motivated by the wish of many IPPNW doctors to improve their dialogue method, I conducted an evaluation of some IPPNW dialogue meetings. After my graduation from medical school, I had the chance to spend some months at the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker-Centre for Science and Peace Research in Hamburg (ZNF). Thanks to the centre's director Prof. Martin Kalinowski, a physicist focussing on nuclear safeguarding technology, who shares my belief in the potential of dialogue for nuclear disarmament, I was able to carry out this evaluation.

In 2008, I attended and evaluated three DWDM meetings in India, and organised and evaluated seven dialogue meetings between students and diplomats at the NPT PrepCom in Geneva.

The suggestions for improvement of the IPPNW dialogue meetings that were made during the evaluation referred mainly to the need for improved preparation, which is always a problem due to the very limited time that is usually available for this. Often the meeting is announced with short notice and the international group of doctors meets only the night before. During this one shared evening it is decided who will chair the meeting and who will say what. There is not much time for a substantive or contextual discussion, to phrase and rehearse the main arguments, or to share detailed information on the background of the decision-maker. All this has to be done individually at home. This is also difficult, not only because most participants are usually busy in their jobs as doctors, but because there is frequently no allocation of tasks. Without limiting the material the work can become overwhelming. Here is an overview of suggestions for improvement of future dialogues that were often made by the IPPNW dialogue participants:

**The detailed results of the evaluation (in German) are available at [http://www.znf.uni-hamburg.de/OP\\_No6.pdf](http://www.znf.uni-hamburg.de/OP_No6.pdf).**

## **Before the dialogue:**

- appoint someone to be responsible for the preparation;
- appoint someone to chair the dialogue meeting;
- allocate clearly the topics and tasks for each of the IPPNW participants, to facilitate preparation at home and to make sure that detailed knowledge is available during the dialogue;
- research fully what the responsibilities of the political dialogue partners for nuclear weapon policies are and estimate their impact;
- research fully the nuclear doctrine of a country, read the statements of the political dialogue partners on nuclear weapons;
- select carefully which topics should be addressed in the dialogue;
- provide materials for preparation at home;
- plan enough time for preparation as a group;
- get to know each other as a group;
- phrase goals and main arguments;
- carefully select information material to give to decision-makers;
- optional: prepare an opening and a closing statement, rehearse lines of argumentation.

## During the dialogue meeting:

- respect the chair;
- create a good atmosphere before starting into the real discussion;
- integrate all IPPNW participants;
- don't forget documentation.

The overall result of the evaluation was that there are some things that can and should be optimised but that the main problems are difficult to change; lack of preparation time and lack of communication in the international group before a dialogue meeting.

It is, of course, easier to arrange dialogue meetings with local groups who can easily meet in person some time before a dialogue. But the special strength of international dialogue, which gives them their moral power is that doctors from all over the world join for nuclear abolition.

The results of the evaluation can be used to facilitate the preparation of dialogue meetings. Mostly, they are common sense and I think that they put forward enough suggestions for improving the general framework. The question that remains, however, is:

How can we reach the goal that is most often identified in the evaluation: to achieve a change of mind?

The evaluation did not develop new ideas on how to concretely inspire changes of mind. This is certainly because such a substantive discussion requires a more personal setting than a written survey can offer.

## 7. Ideas for future dialogue

**The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes.**

**Marcel Proust**

My experience with student dialogue on nuclear weapons has convinced me that the first step for achieving a change of mind is to identify and to understand the attitudes of the others. The awareness of typical reasoning patterns on nuclear weapons, that are often used by decision-makers, as described by Sarah Koch in her thesis, could facilitate the often difficult task of identifying and subsequently addressing the attitudes of a decision-maker in the limited time of a dialogue, lasting between 1 and 2 hours at the most.

The findings from psychology research that she has applied to the conflict on nuclear weapons are, on the one hand, useful for us to understand better the subtle reasons behind support for the retention of nuclear weapons like, for instance,



identity relevant factors. On the other hand they present strong arguments to rebut the widespread belief that the possession of nuclear weapons by the official nuclear weapon states is due to rational strategies.

Therefore I think that it could be effective to objectively present such findings on the psychological implications of nuclear weapons to decision-makers in a similar way as we present scientific information on the medical consequences of nuclear weapons.

This would not only enable them to understand the dynamics of nuclear politics better but could also inspire them to critically reflect their own convictions.

The need to inform decision-makers on the medical and ecological consequences of nuclear weapons and on nuclear weapons in general remains, of course, unchanged or even is growing in importance. I sometimes noticed that diplomats who were officially working on nuclear weapons – at least as a part of their responsibilities – lacked basic knowledge on the issue. I find this also reflected in the decision-maker's replies to Sarah's question on spontaneous associations to nuclear weapon – mostly referred to Hiroshima or to the media fuelled fear of rogue states acquiring nuclear weapons at some time in the future, whereas the magnitude and the destructive power of today's nuclear weapon arsenals hardly ever got a mention.

Although informational input is indeed crucial for dialogue to take place, I find it even more important to leave enough time to conduct the actual dialogue. In the student dialogue meetings we usually began with a brief and objective presentation of the most relevant facts on nuclear weapons and then spent the main part of the time with an interactive dialogue. Of course the information that is presented to decision-makers has to meet higher scientific standards than for the student dialogue and should be chosen specifically for each decision-maker.

What I think is important to consider is that:

1. it is not self-evident that decision-makers are aware of the basic facts of nuclear weapons and;
2. changes of mind can't be achieved by merely increasing the amount of information.

The case for why nuclear weapons should be abolished can be made with comparably little sound information if there is agreement on some basic philosophical questions. I assume that occasions are rarely found for decision-makers to honestly discuss such questions during their daily political business.

Therefore we should invite them to do so in a dialogue with us.



Sign on speakers table at the UN during NGO presentations.

## Networking and expert dialogue: Call for feedback, opinions and expertise!

The research and writing of this booklet is an expression of our wish to galvanize a discussion. We therefore warmly invite you - professionals, psychologists, doctors, mediators and all other interested readers - to give us your feedback and share your thoughts, knowledge and criticism with us. Your contributions and professional opinion will help to enlarge the discussion about dialogue on nuclear disarmament and could stimulate further research in the field. We are planning to edit a subsequent edition to this booklet, including different voices from professionals working in the field of nuclear disarmament dialogue. We are eager to establish a professional network to explore deeper psychological contributions to the nuclear disarmament process. Please send us your texts to the following address: [dialoguewithdecisionmakers@gmail.com](mailto:dialoguewithdecisionmakers@gmail.com).



Meeting with German  
Parliamentarians at the  
NPT Review conference in  
New York, 2010

Please send us your feedback, opinions and expertise to the following address:

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## About the authors

**Inga Blum** is a medical doctor currently pursuing her speciality training in neurology in her native town of Hamburg. Before studying medicine she volunteered in an orphanage in Cameroon, an experience which enriched her but also bereaved her of illusions about the potential of development aid to effectively fight global inequality and poverty. As a medical student she got involved in IPPNW where she learned about the medical, social and political effects of nuclear weapons and became convinced that the abolition of nuclear weapons would not only liberate the world from its greatest threat to health and survival but would simultaneously increase international justice and free resources for real security needs. This was her motivation to co-ordinate the Nuclear Weapons Inheritance Project and other students activity against nuclear weapons while still a student, to take part in IPPNW Dialogues with Decision-makers and to undertake an evaluation of IPPNW dialogue at the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker- Centre for Science and Peace Research after her graduation. Currently, she is still intensely seeking ways to combine peace work with her full working schedule at the hospital.

**Sarah Koch** studied psychology in Bern and Hamburg and has several years of work experience as a sign language interpreter. Her main interests have always been in the field of interpersonal communication and constructive conflicts management. Throughout the years, her interests in mediation and conflict transformation as well as diplomacy and international politics have grown. Her engagement with nuclear disarmament is driven by the urge to understand the rational of those thinking differently and to find ways to establish synergies and overcome mutual reproaching. She is confident that the least sign of willingness to learn about the others' reasons and motives can open doors and lead to common grounds. With her diploma thesis, she hopes to contribute a small piece to the invaluable work of IPPNW. Her thesis emerged from an interdisciplinary cooperation between the Psychological Institute of the University of Hamburg and the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker-Center for Science and Peace Research at the University of Hamburg, supervised by Prof. Alexander Redlich and Prof. Martin Kalinowski, and was awarded by the Gert-Sommer-Award 2010 of the German Peace Psychology Association.

**Xanthe Hall** has worked as the nuclear disarmament campaigner at IPPNW Germany for over 18 years and is based at their office in Berlin, Germany. Xanthe was born in Scotland, grew up in England and studied Drama and Theatre Arts at Birmingham University. In the early eighties, she was a member of the West Midlands Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) executive committee responsible for Non-violent Direct Action and worked as a staff member for CND before leaving for West Berlin in 1985. Xanthe co-founded the Abolition 2000 Global Network for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in 1995. She also helped found the German Abolition national network - Traegerkreis "Atomwaffen abschaffen". Xanthe is a member of the Executive Committee of Middle Powers Initiative and the Abolition Global Council. She is European Coordinator of the Parliamentarians for Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament and German 2020 Vision Campaigner for Mayors for Peace.



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