

Editorial

Experts warn of extinction, overcrowding

When 19 of the world's most brilliant people, and about 75 assorted environmental and arms control experts get together, we should listen to what they have to say.

What they say is this: We face extinction in a nuclear war or an environmental catastrophe "unless humanity changes its ways."

Nineteen Nobel prize winners and 75 experts are holding a five-day conference called "The Fate of the Earth." According to an Associated Press article in the Lincoln Star, the group issued its first amendment Wednesday.

The statement cites the danger of a

computer failure that could set off the destruction of the earth in about six minutes. "It's a different ballgame and the rules need to be looked at again," the statement says.

The statement also cites the imminence of a "nuclear winter" that would blot out the sun for a long time after a nuclear war. But nukes aren't the only danger.

"What nuclear war could do in 50 to 100 minutes, an exploding population assaulting the Earth's life-support systems could do in 50 to 150 years," it said.

The two problems are inseparable, the statement says. As population increases, the struggle for the things we need to live becomes more intense. Disarming would

only be a "quick fix" for the root problem — overcrowding.

The statement calls on the Senate and House to have hearings on nuclear winter. It urges them to see if "the risks of destroying civilization have now rendered nuclear war obsolete."

It also urges congress to strengthen the War Powers Act, which requires congressional approval for keeping U.S. troops in situations like Beirut, to establish a system in which non-aligned nations would have to verify compliance with nuclear arms treaties and to increase U.S. funding for international family planning programs.

It encourages all nations to "recognize that a rational national security policy

should freeze the arms race, reduce nuclear weapons stockpiles, prepare the economy for peacetime production and seek, in the long term, the universal abolition of nuclear weapons." Wise words.

The human capacity for change and adaptation is incredible. The goals of the members of the conference are not impossible to achieve — and they are certainly worthy goals.

The recent wave of patriotic feeling across the United States stems from a hard-line foreign policy and a glitzy media-oriented president. America is "strong again."

We must ask ourselves, however, whether we are being strong, or stupid.

Computer microchips may decide nuclear issue

Is it possible that finally, after lo these many years of arms negotiations, we have accidentally come up with a real live bargaining chip?

The chip that I am thinking of is a microchip, the brain in the computer that tells a weapon what to do. My hopes were raised last week when the government announced in rapid succession that (1) Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was coming for a chat with President Reagan, (2) we were going to sell more wheat to the Russians, and (3) about 15 million microchips sold to the Defense Department and lodged in almost everything that moves, including the computers on the B-52 nuclear-bomber force, were inadequately tested.

What an opportunity! Instead of selling the USSR our

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wheat, we could sell them our microchips. We could promise Gromyko to add one million of these microchips to our nuclear equipment for every million they add to theirs. Soon Soviet and American arms would be equally screwed up. Instead of investigating Texas Instruments, we could award it the Nobel Peace Prize.

My black humor plan for peace in our time was developed, I admit, out of indecision. I can't decide whether the latest bulletin about potential flaws in our nuclear defenseware is good news or bad news. Presumably it's good news if it means the nuclear bombs can't get out of the ground, the subs or the planes. It's bad news if the micro brain sends them off on whim.



If there's one piece of information that has been processed by human brains after nearly 40 years of living in the Atomic Age, it's that progress in technology is not always progress in real life. Back in 1949, when we were the only country with The Bomb, 59 percent of Americans actually thought that it was good that the atom bomb was developed. By 1983, 65 percent of us thought it was bad.

Reagan is still locked into the role he played for General Electric in the '50s when progress was "our most important product," but most of us have doubts. The march of progress has, for example, cut down the amount of time it takes for a missile to commute from one continent to another. Let's hear it for the scientists.

Occasionally, when I wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning I think about the gap between missile time and human time. (No one thinks of anything good at 3 a.m.) I have a recurring image of a joint chief waking up the president — any president, not just this sleepy one — because the computer has said that there are missiles a half-hour away. It's time to decide the fate of the Earth. "Wait a minute," the president says, searching for his slippers, "I have to get a cup of coffee."

The most up-to-date additions to enhance our national security, the Pershing II missiles placed in Europe, are only about six minutes from Moscow. We have actually outstripped my visions of Presidents and coffee cups. It leaves the decision up to the computers of our paranoid partners in this madness.

This brings us back to microchips and bargaining chips. The latest study of our nuclear attitudes by the Public Agenda Foundation shows that, with almost monotonous consistency, Americans now regard nuclear war as "unwinnable, horrible, unsurvivable." We don't believe in building new weapons as bargaining chips. A full 84 percent say that what usually happens is that the Soviets build one to match us.

In the business of nuclear arms, we have finally figured out that less is more, slower is better, and technological progress deserves a good leaving alone. If my fantasy doesn't work, if Gromyko refuses to bargain with the computer chips on the table, there's always another plan. Let the White House and the Kremlin negotiate under the real motto of the arms race: Regress is our most important product.

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Campus Quotes

Should the issue of religion be a part of this year's presidential campaigning?



Barb Rinne
Junior
Wildlife Management
"No. Religion doesn't have anything to do with political status or government."



Sonia Wright
Junior
Home Economics
"I think there are more important topics to be discussed. Not that religion isn't important, but it's more of a private issue."



Dan Healy
Freshman
Agricultural Economics
"It kind of depends to a certain point. I think it's going to be involved no matter what, but I don't think it should be a major issue by any means."



Charles Fowler
Graduate Student
Agronomy
"... I'd rather know where a man stands, but to be using religion as politics, I think it's poor. You're tampering with something that has a lot higher purpose than what they're using it for."



Paresch Verma
Graduate Student
Agronomy
"I think it has already entered politics from what I've seen and read. I think we really should not mix politics with religion, and therefore not make it an issue."

Joel Sartore/Daily Nebraskan