

# For a “New Thinking 2.0”!

Almost eight decades after Hiroshima,  
nuclear weapons are becoming socially acceptable again

by Leo Ensel\*



Leo Ensel.  
(Picture ma)

Since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, 79 years ago, humanity as a whole has been killable. The “New Thinking” that followed from this realisation and was co-developed by Mikhail Gorbachev therefore placed

the survival of humanity at the centre of political action. Today, a renaissance, a “New Thinking 2.0”, is more necessary than ever!

“The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything – except our way of thinking, and so we are drifting towards an unparalleled catastrophe. A new way of thinking is necessary if humanity is to survive.”

This was written on 24 May 1946 by none other than *Albert Einstein*, who for his part was not entirely innocent of the “unleashed power of the atom” – to put it mildly.

It was to take almost another decade before renowned intellectuals began to fulfil Einstein’s demand, namely, to think through the consequences of the invention of the atomic bomb for mankind, indeed for the entire planet, and to put them precisely into words. One of the first to do so was the philosopher *Günther Anders*, who in the 1950s put the unheard-of fact of a possible *man-made apocalypse* into classical terms:

“Hiroshima as the state of the world. On 6 August 1945, Hiroshima Day, we entered a new age. It is an age in which, at any moment, we can turn any place, even the earth as a whole, into a Hiroshima. We have become, modo negativo, all-powerful. However, since this also means that we can be annihilated at any moment, we have, simultaneously, become com-

pletely powerless. No matter how long it lasts, perhaps into eternity, this age will be the last: Its defining characteristic, the possibility of self-annihilation, will never end – unless by means of the end itself.”

Anders differentiated between three epochs in human history: Until the Nazis developed their extermination facilities, the classic sentence “*All human beings are mortal*” applied. The killing machines in the extermination camps elevated this sentence to the cynical formula “*All human beings are killable*”. With the use of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even this malicious phrase was already antiquated. Since then, and for all time to come, the final climax has been: “*Humanity as a whole is killable.*”

## What can affect everyone, affects us all

Since 6 August 1945, when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, nothing less than the survival of humanity itself has been at stake, which was only constituted as *humanity* – albeit modo negativo – by this epochal event. Günther Anders:

“For the bomb has achieved one thing: It is now a battle of humanity. What religions and philosophies, what empires and revolutions have failed to achieve: to make us truly one humanity – it has succeeded. What can affect everyone, affects us all. The falling roof becomes our roof. As morituri [condemned to death] we are now us. For the first time for real.”

The consequence: since radioactive clouds don’t give a damn about military alliances, power blocs and national borders, and since today’s genetic mutations will affect all future generations – indeed, the destruction of humanity today would destroy all unborn generations – there are only “neighbours”: in space and in time. For the first time in the history of mankind, there really is a human interest that transcends all class, religious and other differences: *the continuation of life as a species*.

The maxim “New Thinking” is to make this realisation the decisive pivotal point and to draw

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the necessary consequences for political action from it.

### **Peace movement in the West – Gorbachev in the East**

It was to take a few more decades before “New Thinking” with its fundamental principles – prioritising general human interests as a prerequisite for satisfying all other interests, combating the dangers threatening humanity (weapons of mass destruction, ecological catastrophe) and renouncing violence – finally reached the level of politics.

In the 1980s, it entered the global political stage in the form of two actors: In Western Europe as a peace movement which, in reaction to the threat of the deployment of American medium-range missiles, postulated the exit from the logic of the arms race with the demand “Someone must start to stop!” and very quickly saw itself as a movement for the survival of humanity in general – and in the East in the form of Soviet party leader *Mikhail Gorbachev* and his administration.

Based on the fact “that humanity has become mortal for the first time in its history and that the nature of modern weapons no longer leaves any state any hope of defending itself by military means alone, even the most powerful ones”, Gorbachev [“Glasnost. The New Thinking” 1989] came to a conclusion that echoed *Willy Brandt* and *Egon Bahr’s* concept of “common security” right down to the wording: “Under today’s conditions, security, especially that of the nuclear superpowers, can only be mutual and – in a global context – only all-encompassing. The policy of strength has fundamentally outlived its usefulness.”

To him, this meant the primacy of politics, i.e. negotiations, renouncing the “zero-sum game” method (my gain is your loss) and the courage to transform a vision of humanity into a concrete goal of political action: “The only right way is the elimination of nuclear weapons, the reduction and limitation of armaments in general.”

On 15 January 1986, the political sensation was perfect: The then General Secretary of the CPSU read out a declaration that pointed the way to a world free of nuclear weapons by the year 2000 in concrete and achievable partial initiatives.

In retrospect, Gorbachev repeatedly emphasised that his policy of “New Thinking” was not a

gigantic brainchild at his desk, but was developed, modified, implemented and refined step by step in interaction with practical politics. “New Thinking” and new action were mutually dependent.

And because this policy was driven forward at full speed and consistently by the Soviet Union and now – a true “Copernican turn in disarmament policy” that defeated nothing less than the logic of the arms race itself! – was not thought of in quantitative but in qualitative categories, this time real successes were achieved in the field of disarmament:

The joint declaration with *Ronald Reagan* that a nuclear war could never be won by one side and should therefore never be started and that neither side should strive for military dominance was followed by, among other things, the scrapping of all land-based short and medium-range nuclear missiles, the reduction of strategic nuclear missiles and the destruction of a total of 80 per cent of all nuclear warheads worldwide. And in the “Charter of Paris”, adopted in November 1990 by all European states – including the Soviet Union, the USA and Canada – which sealed the official end of the Cold War, *Mikhail Gorbachev’s* vision of the “Common European Home” already seemed to be taking on clear contours. Its epoch-making maxim was: “*Security is indivisible, and the security of each participating state is inseparable from that of all others.*”

Times we can only dream of today! And a long time gone.

### **Two thousand five hundred-Second World Wars**

Since then, however, times have changed dramatically. Since the beginning of the noughties, almost all disarmament and arms control treaties have been abolished – almost exclusively under pressure from the USA – including the most important disarmament treaty in world history, the INF Treaty signed by *Mikhail Gorbachev* and *Ronald Reagan* at the end of 1987. (And this has serious consequences for the present and the immediate future...)

The Cold Warriors in the West and East have regained the upper hand, and not just since Russia’s war against Ukraine: Nuclear bombs are once again socially acceptable on all sides, warheads are being “modernised” and made “fit for purpose” – i.e. manageable – and their possible first use is now not only explicitly anchored in the doctrines of the USA and Russia, but in the course of the Ukraine war there were already

notable voices openly advocating “preemptive retaliatory strikes”!

And an uncontrolled arms race with extremely accurate delivery systems such as hypersonic missiles, which can hardly be eliminated in time, has long been in full swing. The latter, together with American *cruise missiles*, are to be stationed in Germany again in two years' time. At the same time, work is being carried out everywhere on concepts for artificial intelligence, which – especially in combination with the weapons systems mentioned – threatens to take on a life of its own. All this even though the approximately 15,800 nuclear bombs currently stockpiled worldwide have a combined explosive power equivalent to around two thousand five hundred-Second World Wars!

In short: Mikhail Gorbachev's disarmament policy legacy, the sensational practical consequence of his “New Thinking”, has been willfully driven to the wall with full force. And a powerful peace movement like that of the 1980s is still nowhere in sight!

### **For a “New Thinking 2.0”!**

If there is to be any prospect of a remedy at all, then the first consequence would be to finally take note of these facts again, as alarming as they may be, and to anchor them in the general consciousness of politicians and the populations of the countries directly and indirectly affected – in other words, of everyone. A return to the principles of “New Thinking”, i.e. “New Thinking 2.0”, is now more necessary than ever! Therefore, once again and for the hundredth time:



*On 11 October 1986, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev launched nuclear disarmament talks.  
(Keystone/AP Photo/Ron Edmons)*

A nuclear war knows no winners, only losers. Either we abolish the nuclear bomb or the nuclear bomb abolishes us! Whoever wants peace must – in a reversal of the classic Latin proverb – prepare for peace.

If the policy of the new escalation intensifies even further and no pressure is exerted against it “from below”, then the ultimate threat is nothing less than – *globocide!* Be it militarily via weapons of mass destruction or “peacefully” as a climate catastrophe. We cannot afford resignation or inertia. Einstein's admonition still applies:

“Mere praise of peace is simple but ineffective. What we need is active participation in the struggle against war and everything that leads to war.”

In this sense, then.

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