

# Richard Falk and David Krieger: The Path to Zero: Dialogues on Nuclear Dangers

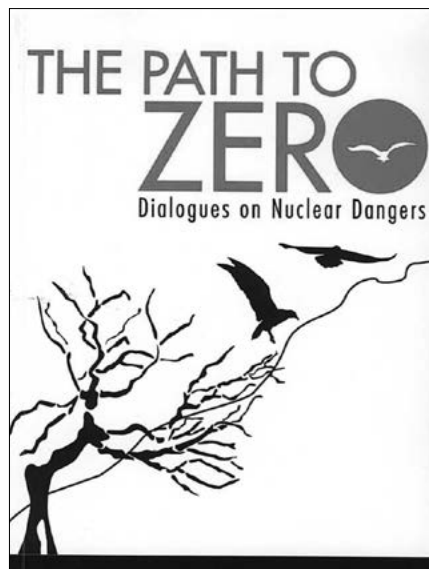
*Reviewed by Gordon Hertel*

It took 44 seconds for the world to enter its nuclear age. After those critical seconds, as Little Boy fell to its detonation height, the world bore witness to the greatest destructive weapon humanity had ever created. In the years since those moments, governments have expanded their arsenals to an apocalyptic sum in the name of national security. Reining in the regime of nuclear weapons is the greatest struggle young generations must face to secure a peaceful world.

*The Path to Zero: Dialogues on Nuclear Dangers* describes the difficulty of this struggle as well as the possibilities that lay ahead for us as a species. The work takes the form of a dialogue between the disarmament advocates Richard Falk and David Krieger. Falk has a tenure at Princeton University and has published numerous books on topics such as human rights, critical dangers to the planet, and international justice. Krieger is the founder and former president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and has a long history in the field of nuclear non-proliferation. He has published over forty books, the majority of which are concerned with abolishing nuclear weapons. Both authors are knowledgeable not only about the processes governing nuclear weapons in international law, but also about the steps we must take to address the threat for current and future generations. This expertise is evident throughout the discussion. The monograph opens by declaring its overarching goal: “This book was conceived as a way to explore many of the dangers of nuclear weapons, to dig beneath the surreal surface tranquillity that has largely surrounded their existence” (xv). By demystifying the world of nuclear weapons with its strange concepts of deterrence and nuclear security, the authors shine a light on the extreme dangers that hang over us. The authors also “hope that the dialogues will be a catalyst to broader societal discussion of nuclear dangers” (xvi). With the goals of the monograph established, the introduction concludes with a positive note that personal enterprise and action can be the tool to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The book is separated into ten chapters, each with a specific focus on one aspect of disarmament and nuclear weapons. There are several subchapters dedicated to specific points, where each author provides their insight in a few paragraphs or more. This format allows the book to cover a wide range of topics. Some sections, however, are shorter than others, with some as short as a single page. This can lead to an unbalanced reading experience, as topics shift quickly and sometimes lack in-depth analysis.

The first five chapters explore how we came to the nuclear age, how we define nuclear deterrence and proliferation, how we



differentiate nuclear arms control from nuclear disarmament, and finally, how a culture of militarism influences nuclear policy. The authors begin by discussing the stakes. They state that abolishing nuclear weapons is “the most urgent struggle of our time” (21) and that “each of us who cares about the human future must act to ensure that no other cities suffer the same fate as Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (23). As the book was written in 2012, the authors examine then President Barack Obama’s Prague speech made in 2009 announcing the ‘New START’ arms control program. In this speech he sets the US’s goal for a world without nuclear weapons and a better peaceful humanity. Throughout the work, the authors refer to this speech as a critical moment in recent nuclear arms

developments but are hesitant to say it led us closer to a world without nuclear weapons. Rather, they point out the differences between arms control, which is “very much in keeping with the reliance on nuclear weapons for various forms of deterrence” (66) and disarmament, which seeks absolute removal of nuclear weapons from all states. The authors spend much of the first five chapters discussing the significance of the Prague speech and its contradictions in comparison to more substantial disarmament propositions such as the McCloy-Zorin Accords.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus primarily on the goal of disarmament and what impedes our progress towards a world without nuclear weapons. As Falk states, “to achieve a breakthrough [...] we need to aim above the target to have any chance of hitting it” (75). This means the aim of disarmament should be to undo a deeply rooted systemic reliance on violence and war. To achieve this goal, all nuclear states must “unconditionally declare No First Use of nuclear weaponry [...] propose the negotiation of a multilateral treaty to establish an upper limit on defence spending to 1 percent of gross national product” (78) and “give the nuclear weapon states until 2015 to put forward a serious nuclear disarmament proposal” (79). These last chapters of the first half of the monograph explore viable options for long-term disarmament and how a culture of militarism can affect the disarmament process. To usher in an age of disarmament and escape the nuclear era, the authors argue that a global change must begin with the United States but requires a massive shift in the US’s militaristic culture. As militarism stems from political elites, it is the average citizen who must be engaged politically and fight against this culture of war. Breaking this culture will encourage politicians to dismantle complacency and reliance on deterrence. We should not be comfortable with several states having nuclear weapons capable of ending the world, and the authors want more citizens to be aware of this fact.

In the second half of the monograph, Falk and Krieger investigate international law, nuclear energy, and democracy to see how nuclear weapons have entwined themselves with our global perception of safety and weaponry. Between the Fukushima nuclear incident and growing concerns about Iran's nuclear program, tensions about nuclear energy in 2012 were high. The authors also share concerns regarding nuclear power in general, as "in effect, a sophisticated nuclear energy program provides a country with a threshold capability to produce weaponry in a short period or by covert means" (102). The authors criticise the further developments in nuclear power in the United States, China, and India, and praise Germany for its prompt shutdown of its nuclear power program. Having discussed nuclear energy at length, the authors then move on to analysing nuclear weapons from the perspective of international law.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is surprisingly lax when it comes to nuclear weapons. The organisation only provides states with recommendations or official opinions. The authors consider these facts thoroughly and make numerous observations about the policy of nuclear deterrence, the ineffectiveness of global institutions at encouraging disarmament, and the role citizens play in this legal context. The authors argue for a mass movement that not only fights against the presence of nuclear weapons, but the culture of militarism in the US as well. The authors do focus primarily on the US in their criticism of militarism and would have done well to include other nations affected by this dangerous ideology. Krieger states that the "most important challenge of the Nuclear Age is to awaken people everywhere, particularly young people, and engage them in ending both nuclearism and militarism. If we cannot bring about rapid change toward a culture of peace, at least we can plant the seeds" (156). By encouraging a fight against both nuclear weapons and militarism, the authors also seek to fight the culture of complacency in everyday life. This culture was built by excluding vital details from the public eye and making nuclear weapons undemocratic.

In chapter 9, the authors critique the undemocratic approaches towards nuclear weapons: "It seems to me that nuclear weapons, by their nature and the threat posed by their spread to other countries, demand a high level of secrecy, which may simply be incompatible with democratic practice" (174). This begs the question: How can citizens in a state that claims to be democratic accept something so incompatible with this principle? Krieger acknowledges this contradiction and states that nuclear weapons damage democracy "but only insofar as the people acquiesce and are content to remain complacent bystanders. I continue to believe that the potential of democracy, but only of an active and engaged democracy, offers a way out" (178). The authors construct this point well but could have made their argument more concrete by offering potential methods to create this open and engaged democracy. The realm of digital activism and engagement, for example, has developed significantly in the last twenty years and could provide a means to engage the public in a campaign against nuclear proliferation and create this space on a large scale. The authors could have utilised this method for engaging the public as a suggestion for individuals or grassroots organisations to engage wider civil society. In the concluding chapter, the authors consider what means may be used to get the public engaged and on the 'path to zero'.

To conclude the discussion, the authors turn toward the practical means of beginning the titular path to zero. They consider the difficulty of translating the aspirational (some would even argue utopian) goal of a peaceful world to a political project. The first step is a 'No First Use Policy' implemented by the United States.

If the US cannot be the leaders of a disarmament movement, the authors are in favour of progress beginning elsewhere – such as in non-nuclear states. Beyond this political dimension, there exists a cultural one as well. For this, the authors highlight the importance of youth and their capacity for action against injustice. The book then ends with a call for action for people of all ages and nationalities, as nuclear weapons are a global threat – with potential consequences that would transcend state boundaries.

*The Path to Zero: Dialogues on Nuclear Dangers* is a mix of dialogue and manifesto designed to paint a picture of the movement for nuclear disarmament and its challenges. Other reviewers such as Lawrence Wittner calls the monograph "a work of great insight and wisdom – an important part of a global transformation". John Scales Avery states that the book "shakes us out of our complacency". I agree with both sentiments and can only highlight the works' power. Its passages on deterrence through nuclear weaponry help reveal why it fails as a security concept, as well as how both the decision makers *and* the civil society of nuclear states are entrenched in the military industrial complex.

Despite its slightly uneven pacing, the work flows seamlessly from point to point. Many of the observations are strongly outlined; however, there are some improvements that can be made. The authors invest much of their time outlining the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons and although this is done through different lenses such as international law, civil action, and others, it still leaves the monograph feeling repetitive. There is also only a brief discussion of practical solutions toward the end. The absence of in-depth case studies, paired with the focus on the US, gives the analysis a narrow focus. There is a brief anti-colonialist message which is appreciated, but other nations are mostly mentioned only in their capacity to obtain nuclear weapons. China's No First Use Policy is still in effect but was only mentioned in passing. A more detailed discussion of this policy could have provided an insightful case study revealing the steps other nations are taking against nuclear weapons. As mentioned, the authors are primarily focused on the United States; however, nuclear weapons pose an existential risk to both current and future generations around the globe and require a unified effort not exclusive to the US. Looking into other nations could have provided a more global perspective.

The authors also invest an entire chapter to the dangers of nuclear energy as a means for nuclear proliferation. The authors could have also considered the dangers of the climate crisis as well here. Nuclear power is a recyclable energy source that provides a means (or at least a temporary stopgap) to the encroaching climate crisis. By advocating for the complete removal of all nuclear power to prevent proliferation, is this not feeding another, slower apocalypse? Where do we strike a middle ground between preventing proliferation and still creating usable energy?

*The Path to Zero* is a dense discussion with a broad collection of ideas. The book is well written with strong observations made surrounding contemporary events in 2012; however, the authors could have employed more in-depth global case studies to aid the goals of the book. This book works well as an introduction to disarmament, especially for those who are still persuaded by concepts such as deterrence. Despite these critiques, *The Path to Zero* is a powerful work which serves its goal well as an open door to the diverse and compelling literature on disarmament.

Falk, Richard / Krieger, David (2012): *The Path to Zero: Dialogues on Nuclear Dangers*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers. 223 Pages. ISBN: 978-1-61205-214-4 (Paperback). Price: £38 Paperback.