

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

A Few Words About Ted Taylor

Stanislav Rodionov

Russian Editor, Journal of Science and Global Security, Space Research Institute,
Moscow, Russia

The history of nuclear weapons has some examples when active scientists sharply changed their attitude toward the role of nuclear weaponry. First of all, one may remember the British physicist Joseph Rotblat who left the Manhattan Project in 1944 on moral grounds, after General Grows made the statement that the atom bomb was intended not to defeat Nazi Germany or even the Japanese but was instead meant to intimidate the Soviets (American allies at that time). Later Rotblat became one of the founders of the Pugwash Movement and supported the idea of the world with no nuclear weapons.

The well-known American physicist Richard Garwin designed the first U.S. thermonuclear device but later became an active member of the Pugwash Movement. Andrey Sakharov, the “father” of the Soviet thermonuclear bomb, realized the danger of unrestrained nuclear weapons race, left off all weapons activities and devoted himself to politics.

Ted Taylor might be considered as one member of this family. At the dawn of nuclear weaponry’s development, Ted invented some extreme nuclear (fission) devices for the U.S. stockpile, for instance, the minimum-sized one as well as the bomb with the highest explosive yield. He was the first to use the reactor-grade plutonium as a kind of a nuclear explosive. But a few years later, he did an about-face in his perception of nuclear weaponry, and after about a decade, he rejected nuclear power as well. Ted’s paper, Nuclear Power and Nuclear Weapons published in Vol. 13, 1–2: 117–128 of this journal presents his recollections of this evolution.

It should be noted that Ted, unlike Rotblat or Sakharov, was not interested in a large-scale public activity, although he might use a good opportunity to

Address correspondence to Stanislav Rodionov, Space Research Institute. E-mail: Stan.Rodionov@asp.iki.rssi.ru

express again and again his categorical assertions about the harm from all aspects of nuclear energy. Few people in Russia (except some specialists) remember Ted now, but about 20 years ago he became a transient “star” of the Soviet mass media when he visited Moscow. All Moscow newspapers reported about the former American nuclear weapons designer who visited Red Square and was charmed with its beauty. “This Square was for me in the past just a spot on a military map, just a target for my warheads. Now I would like to forget my previous intentions.” Moscow reporters attributed those words to Ted. By the way, such an attribution does not appear to be a serious exaggeration.

I met Ted for the first time during his visit to Moscow. I had seen him at the International Conference held by the Committee of Soviet Scientists for Peace against Nuclear Threats (CSS). He was a tall handsome man with a sunburnt Indian-like face who reminded me of a hero from one of James Fenimore Cooper’s novels. We met many times since, but mostly at the Pugwash Conferences. The subjects of these conferences corresponded to Ted’s scientific and public points of view. So, he used these annual meetings in order to present his opinion on nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. I do remember how I did not support Ted’s idea to phase out nuclear power completely (it happened at the 40th Pugwash Conference, held in Egham, UK, 1990). He did not respond but only smiled. It looked like he had had enough time to be subjected to criticism, and now he’d stopped noticing trivial (from his point of view) remarks.

We often discussed privately various problems, even everyday occurrences. We both were involved in Pugwash publishing activities, and we prepared papers (different!) for two books: the first one was devoted to verification of the WMD, and the second one—to problems of a world with no nuclear weapons. I enjoyed those meetings, where we discussed with others many issues connected with the preparation of papers for these books. Ted was a man of few words but he became more active when a subject of discussion was of interest to him.

Harold Feiveson mentioned that Ted presented one of the first articles for our journal. This article on “The Verified Elimination of Nuclear Warhead” was, I know, carefully looked through in Soviet nuclear centers. A short passage from Ted’s paper about reactor-grade plutonium has reminded me of one funny episode. After one of some CSS/FAS meetings in Moscow, a Russian participant (by the way, a Minatom official) asked me: “Who is this Dr. Taylor?” I answered: “He invented the atomic bomb from reactor-grade plutonium.” The reaction of my interlocutor was quite unpredictable: “He is a liar! It is impossible!” Well, not all Russian specialists know who Dr. Taylor was.