

Dr. Rosalie Bertell: Zero Tolerance for the Destructive Power of War

Excerpt from Dr. Rosalie Bertell's book, Planet Earth, The Latest Weapon of War. Part III: Rethinking Security, Chapter 6: Military Security in the New Millennium

By [Dr. Rosalie Bertell](#)

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Selected Excerpts from Rosalie Bertell's book:

Planet Earth: The Latest Weapon of War

The problems we face at the beginning of the twenty-first century involve interconnected issues of militarism, economics, social policy and the environment. Global consumption of resources is exceeding Earth's restorative capacity by at least 33 per cent. War and the preparation for war drastically reduce the store of these resources still further, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle in which competition for raw materials leads to further conflict. This means that global survival requires a zero tolerance policy for the destructive power of war.



However, I recognize that exposing the extremes of today's military and outlining the crisis in resources will only bring about change if we also tackle the question of security. Popular support for the military comes from fear, and that fear is based on hundreds of years of recorded history.

We feel that we must have weapons to protect ourselves from the weapons of the enemy. This fear legitimizes the development and stockpiling of new weapons and results in the election of public officials who will not hesitate to use violence. This in turn attracts the warrior to public office and reinforces his or her belief that military might is the best assurance of security. If the public were convinced that there were real, viable alternatives to war, such figures would lose their mandate.

Therefore, it is vital that a new concept of security is devised, which puts Earth and its inhabitants first. The old paradigm of security protects wealth, financial investment and privilege through the threat and use of violence. The new concept embraces a more egalitarian vision, prioritizing people, human rights, and the health of the environment. Security is not being abandoned; it is just being achieved through the protection and responsible stewardship of the Earth. I would call this emerging new vision 'ecological security'. Such a shift in focus requires a complex, multi-faceted approach to resource protection and distribution, to conflict resolution and the policing of the natural world. In Chapter 7, I will outline some of the directions we might take towards achieving these goals. But in order to do this, we must first challenge the belief that military force is a necessary evil.

Working for Change

Altering the Core Belief

...The core belief being challenged today is that military power provides security. There exists more than enough evidence to show this belief to be untrue....

Lobbying for Change

The first step in change is the conviction that change is needed.... Those working for peace, economic justice, social equity and environmental integrity must all stay connected. 'Staying connected' in such a grandiose project will never mean total agreement in everything, rather a constant cycle of communication, action, feedback and evaluation. Honest dialogue about successes and failures is a protection against major mistakes during

alternative policy development....

Phasing Out the Military

So how would we actually go about bringing an end to the military? The first and most important requirement is that the military come under civilian control; then we must look at effective disarmament and the redirection of military resources, including human resources, towards more humanitarian aims; finally we must seek alternative means of resolving conflict. We also need to bring the research community into this question so that disarmament becomes a long-term reality.

Control of the Military

Many people were shocked when NATO decided to bomb Kosovo on its own authority. If NATO or some other coalition outside of the United Nations can dictate military policy then the chances of promoting a peaceful solution to any crisis are seriously damaged. There is more security for the public when international actions are based on decisions made by a civilian authority and are backed by the rule of law....

When power is dispersed, it is less likely to be abused.

However, it is clear that the goal of change is not just civilian supervision of the military but the dismantling of the military altogether. This change will not be easy. No country is going to terminate its military forces unless it can be absolutely sure that other countries are doing the same—the fear of being vulnerable to attack would be much too strong.

Disbanding the Military

...Enough data is now available to successfully monitor a freeze in military spending....

An alternative suggestion is to redefine the military's job description. After all, they are supposed to work for us and in our name. Proposals include using military personnel for civilian assistance in ecological crises such as floods or volcanic eruptions. They could also carry out genuine peacekeeping, with new nonviolent training programmes and the development of conflict resolution skills. Imagine unarmed peacekeepers trained in the art of diplomacy. When the option of war is not available, people are forced to think about the many possible but untried responses....

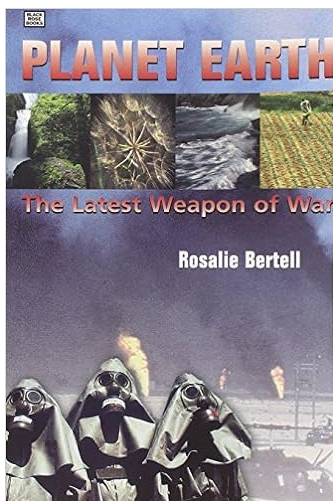
War itself needs to be banned. There are no disputes between nations that cannot now be skills, we should be heading towards an exciting new era of real diplomacy. Indeed even after a war negotiations are necessary before 'peace' is established. The main accomplishment of the violence is to force concessions at the negotiating table, but because a war influences the 'freedom' of the loser, post-war negotiations are notoriously unjust. Often this sets the stage for the next war—one reason perhaps why the Second World War followed on so swiftly from the First. With the Chemical Weapons Convention, banning chemical warfare, which came into force on 29 April 2000, and review of nuclear weapons reduction on the United Nations agenda for the same year, it seems to be the opportune moment to push this nonviolent agenda.

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Rosalie Bertell, born in 1929 in the USA, has passed in 2012 in her convent "Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart" in Pennsylvania. She has PhD in Biometrics from the Catholic Univ., Washington DC in 1966. She has nine PhD honoris causae, several awards, f.i. the Right Livelihood Award in 1986 for "No Immediate Danger? Prognosis for a Radioactive Earth", 1985.



Planet Earth: The Latest Weapon of War

By Dr. Rosalie Bertell

As weaponry and warfare have become more complex and sophisticated, so the long-term effects have become more deadly. In Planet Earth Rosalie Bertell proposes that the key to understanding the impact of future wars lies in a close analysis of the past. She shows how the quest for military power has destabilized the delicate natural balance of the earth's ecosystem, causing widespread devastation in environmental, economic and social terms and calls for a new approach to security, which rises above national agendas to seek global solutions to a global problem.

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