

Thomas Murray to Harry S. Truman, January 16, 1953. President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers.

UNITED STATES  
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

January 16, 1953

Dear Mr. President:

I note in your Farewell Address to the Nation last night in ending your comments on preventive war you said, "Starting an atomic war is totally unthinkable for rational men."

Having thought long and I believe profoundly about this matter of atomic warfare, I would like to take the liberty of expressing a few thoughts which your remarks evoked in my mind. I gathered from the above quoted sentence and its context that you believe that atomic weapons are in a moral category separate from so-called conventional weapons and perhaps separate from biological and chemical methods of warfare. This distresses me especially since it coincides with what I believe to be the invalid reasoning of the Russians.

I think too that your remarks on this subject may lead the people to a confused concept of the morality of atomic warfare. In a sense we started atomic warfare in 1945 and we believed and still believe that in doing so we were not committing an immoral act. To my mind the only change today from 1945 is in the fact of Russian power to retaliate. I am sure you will agree that the morality of an act should not depend upon how power happens to be distributed.

Then again I got the impression from your remarks that the United States was morally foreclosed from taking preventive atomic measures even "in extremis" for example if we knew that Russian submarines were heading for our seacoasts to lob atomic missiles at our major cities.

I feel fairly sure that you intended to give no such impressions as I have mentioned above. I only saw the text of your remarks after they had been given to the press and I regret that I could not have urged these thoughts upon you earlier. It occurs to me, however, that you might want at some future opportunity to make some clarification of the measure of confusion which came to my mind and I believe to the minds of a great many people who are thinking seriously and continuously about this problem. Surely

thinking seriously and continuously about this problem. Surely your utterances on this subject will carry great weight with public opinion in the years to come.



Let me repeat my sincere gratitude for the privilege of serving under your courageous leadership and my best wishes to you for the coming years of relaxation from the cares of your long public service.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas E. Murray".

Thomas E. Murray  
Commissioner



The President

The White House