

Written by John Hallam
Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

Report from John Hallam on 2009 First Committee 3 Oct -3 Nov 2009

(Present 3 Oct - 19Oct)

'Taking the Apocalypse off the Agenda'

Between 3rd October 2009 and 19 Oct 2009, I was in the United States in Washington and New York, lobbying the Obama administration (Ellen Tauschers office) and attending First Committee at the United Nations, talking to diplomats, generals, and NGOs on the issue of nuclear weapons operational readiness.

Thanks to PND fir financial assistance that meant that I did not have to sleep on the streets of New York.

I believe that this session of First Committee and the side - trip to Washington have opened up further possibilities for ongoing work to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems, thereby 'taking the apocalypse off the agenda' and moving us toward a nuclear weapons - free world.

What is First Committee?

First Committee is the oldest, and the largest, of the various subcommittees of the United Nations General Assembly and deals with disarmament and international security. Other committees deal with economics, the environment, education and cultural matters, finances, and UN administration.

First Cttee has been meeting ever since 1946, and ever since then, nuclear weapons have regularly topped its agenda, making up somewhat less than half of its subject - matter. The very first resolution passed by First Committee and by the General Assembly was on nuclear disarmament. Apart from nuclear weapons First Committee deals with other weapons of mass destruction (Chemical and biological warfare), landmines, small-arms and light weapons, conventional weapons, space warfare, cyberspace warfare (increasingly), and the whole range of horrors spanning from the destruction of the ecosphere in about 40 minutes to the very individual maiming of humans on a daily basis by landmines and a dozen ongoing civil wars.

All of this takes place in the vast and cavernous Conference Room 4, just off the almost equally important Vienna Cafe (where you lobby your diplomat over coffee and thankfully now smoke - free), in the first sub-basement of the United Nations Building.

Ever since October 2006, (First Cttee meets throughout all of October), Steven Starr of PSR (www.nucleardarkness.org) and myself have organised meetings or 'side-panels' as they are called, on the obscure and technical sounding but in reality utterly apocalyptic issue, of nuclear weapons operating status or as it is increasingly called, 'operational readiness'.

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

In 2007, in response to an appeal signed by 44 nobels and 364 NGOs that had been put together in 2004-2005 by myself and Doug Mattern of the Association of World Citizens (on this website) urging a resolution in the General Assembly on the operating status of nuclear weapon systems, New Zealand and Sweden, quickly followed by Switzerland, Chile, Nigeria and then Malaysia, decided to put the resolution we were asking for, through the General Assembly.

That resolution, entitled 'operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems' passed 136-3 in Oct2007 and by 141-3 in Oct2008.

When the resolution went up in 2007 it attracted immense attention both from media and from diplomats, and our panel, which in 2006 had struggled a little, was packed with over 80 people sweating in a room designed for 50 as the air-conditioning packed up and Steve showed his inimitable powerpoint in which the world turns black after someone in Serpukhov-15, Stratcom, Kosvinsky Mt or Norad has had the ultimate bad - hair day.

One reason for this was that the US State department had magnanimously done our publicity for us by lying to the 1st cttee about the actual status of US nuclear weapon systems, and I'd circulated the furious rebuttal penned by Bruce Blair (formerly second in command of Stratcom) to the entire General Assembly.

By the time we presented a third time in 2008, our humble panel had morphed into three panels - A debate between us and former US Ambassador Chris Ford at the International Peace Academy over the road, a working lunch for diplomats at the Chilean mission, and a formal panel sponsored by all six governments in the UN basement next to the Vienna Cafe, with prominent US and Russian nuclear weapons experts, and Steve and myself.

Following that, and following panels organised by Steve and I in the NPT meetings in Geneva (May 2008) and NY (May 2009), the Swiss and the New Zealanders together with the East-West Institute got together with US and Russian generals and think - tank people on 21-23 June 2009 at Yverdon Les Bains, a spa town outside Geneva, and discussed ways and means to actually lower the operational readiness of US and Russian nuclear weapon systems. Participants included John Stienbrunner and Geoffrey Forden of MIT (who later participated in our panel) and General Eugene Habinger, former commander of Stratcom. That conference came up with an 'outcome document' entitled 're-framing de-alert', which was to be launched at a panel in the massive Conference Room 4 on 15 October 2009. Meanwhile, Steve and I (after a double - booking or two) organised a panel in the somewhat more humble Conference Room E on the previous day, Oct 14. Our panel was chaired by Ambassador Labbe of Chile (who also chaired the panel on 15th) and as well as Steve and I, included Hans Kristensen of FAS and Geoffrey Forden of MIT.

The order of presentation was:

--Kristensen, who spoke mainly of the ongoing US nuclear posture review and US nuclear posture generally including in particular the exact status of US nuclear forces,

--Forden, on nuclear command and control and strategic stability generally, and JDEC (the

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

Joint Data Exchange Centre, three times proposed and agreed to by the US and Russian governments, but allowed to go into limbo - land; now possibly to be revived according to a statement released by Medvedev and Obama) (appended)

--Myself (with apologies to Forden who is the real expert on this) on the dozen or so occasions on which we have come close to the brink of destruction, with powerpoint (thanks to Syan, Andrew and Cameron), and 'the end' on a cheery thermonuclear weapons - test background.

--Steve, with his even more cheery presentation, on a day by day basis, of what exactly happens after we've 'accidentally' incinerated the worlds 100 or so largest cities, to anyone unlucky enough not to have been made into toast in the first 40 minutes of that ultimate bad hair day. (essentially the world turns black with the massive soot injected into the upper atmosphere that is made of, well, us and all we possess.)

Ambassador Labbe is an affable fellow with a way with words. He commented (paraphrasing Rumsfeld) straight after my presentation of the various times we have brushed with the apocalypse, 'stuff happens'.

The next days panel was a grand affair in conf rm 4, not only chaired by Labbe but also by UN Under-Secy for Disarmament Sergio Duarte, and including retired stratcom chief Eugene Habinger, East-West Institutes W. Pal Sidhu, and Sergei Rogov of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The 'outcome document' (available in PDF on the website of the E-W Institute on which it is prominently displayed)(<http://www.ewi.info/reframingin-nuclear-de-alert-O>) - was officially 'launched'.

This outcome document, which I have now read three times is in my view excellent, adopting a deliberately low - key and non -prescriptive approach. It does I believe, make lowering operational readiness more palatable to military types in the US and Russia, and does so in a manner calculated to produce the minimum of military digging in of heels. In this context, having General Habinger speak in favour of it on the podium was terribly important. This is not to say that digging in of military heels will not take place. It will be vital to have the support of people such as Habinger if we are to 'take the apocalypse off the agenda'.

While at this panel I sat in the highly strategic position usually occupied by the delegate for Djibouti, centre, right in front of the podium. As soon as there was a space for responses (and having pre-arranged this), I attracted Sergio Duarte's attention and read the following, (scribbled furiously in the back of the outcome document in the preceding minutes):

"As the co-author in 2004-5 of an appeal on operational readiness signed by 44 nobels, and as co-organiser on panels on operational readiness in 2006, 2007, 2008 and now 2009 (yesterday, sponsored by Chile) I would like to thank the 6 sponsoring governments of the operational readiness resolution not only for the resolution itself but for their efforts at the diplomatic level to further the cause of lowering operating status/operational readiness.

I have just finished reading the report and I believe that it embodies exactly the pragmatic and balanced approach we need to achieve progress.

I hope it will be possible in the near future:

a) To pass the operational readiness resolution by consensus.

b) That this be an immediate prelude or better still a postlude to real changes in nuclear posture that will literally take the apocalypse off the agenda."

I also managed to make the point that:

"... if/when deterrence fails it will be because decisionmaking is being done in a situation in which decisionmakers have minutes or seconds to make utterly apocalyptic decisions on no information, and in which sirens wail, lights flash and people scream across launch control centres while presidents are bundled at extreme speed into doomsday command planes or deep underground bunkers. In that atmosphere, rational decisionmaking is extremely unlikely, and the dangers are thus of war by mistake, miscalculation, or misadventure. As Ambassador Labbe remarked yesterday 'stuff happens'."

This year, the six governments have decided to put the resolution on 'hold'. Labbe in the panel of 15th, was clear that it will be again on the agenda in 2010. The reasons for having put it on hold are interesting and potentially hopeful. It seems that especially in the US, but also in Russia, that major reviews of nuclear posture are under way. The US government has let it be known that putting the resolution on hold would be 'helpful', and that it would prefer not to be in the position of having to vote 'no' to it as previously. This in itself indicates that the resolution has had its effect already on US policymaking and will continue to do so.

The Swiss, the Swedes, and Ambassador Labbe all made it clear that operational readiness is in no wise going off the agenda. They have said it is vitally important that it be in the final declaration of the 2010 review conference in NY next May, and Steve and I will certainly be there to ensure that it is indeed there. The issue of operational readiness has certainly been kept on the agenda by the two panels, the workshop at Yverdon, and by Steve and my activities throughout the year.

It would indeed be very important to keep it prominently on the NPT Review Conference agenda, and that it be again submitted as a resolution in October 2010. Getting it through by consensus (ie with nuclear weapons state support) would be the best possible outcome. That will require 'yesses' by not only the US and Russia (which may just be possible) but also by France and the UK.

Operating status figured also in a number of other resolutions in this year's first committee including (significantly) Renewed Determination toward the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, which is now co-sponsored not only by Japan and Australia - but by the US, with relatively little change to its text, a dramatic change from 2008 when it voted a surly 'no'.

Operational readiness also is the entire subject matter of Reducing Nuclear Dangers, sponsored by India, as well as by much of NAM. I personally think the text of Reducing Nuclear Dangers is excellent, but it has never had the broad support that ours does (in fact this was a major factor in the decision to urge another op status resolution in 2004), garnering a 'mere' 3/4

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

- 2/3 of all the governments on the planet. The Indian ambassador at the Oct 15th panel bemoaned this fact in an exchange with Labbe, but really needs to talk with the Swiss. I then sidled up to him and said it was a pity that the sponsors of operational readiness and reducing nuclear danger can't work together. It would indeed be immensely helpful if some western countries could break the 'NAM only' pattern of Reducing Nuclear Dangers by voting 'yes' to it. I fully understand the reasons some do not - It is indeed true that India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry is putting the subcontinent on a hairtrigger basis or runs the danger of so doing, with potentially catastrophic consequences for up to 150 million (or even more) people. But this could be dealt with in an EoV, while voting 'yes' to Reducing Nuclear Dangers would send a message that terribly needs to be sent, as well as breaking the somewhat stultifying group voting pattern.

There are at least two other resolutions that include at least brief reference to operational readiness, and these are the NAM nuclear disarmament resolution, sponsored by Myanmar, and one put up by Iran. Though there is significant opposition especially to the Iranian one, all of them garner the support of between 3/4 and 2/3 of all the worlds governments.

I should have mentioned earlier that Steve and I did a side - trip to Washington on 5 October, where we had an interview with Simon Limage, chief of staff of Ellen Tauschers office. Ellen Tauscher is the person in the Obama administration responsible for nuclear disarmament.

Simon didn't give a great deal away, but had been eager to see us, and was certainly most friendly and listened with much attention. Steve was able to show him this 'day after' powerpoint. What he mentioned most prominently was the problem of 'domestic opposition' to any seeming 'lowering of the guard'. This would seem to be, simply, the greatest obstacle to movement in this area. Whether or not a determined administration could overcome it is the key question.

Truly 'taking the apocalypse off the agenda' will require substantial modifications in the operational procedures of US and Russian missile forces, though a simple 'stand - down' of missile forces currently still able to launch at roughly 30 seconds notice, could take in operational terms, not much more than the flipping of a safety switch in each missile silo at a presidential order. The last time such a stand-down took place was in 1990, when Bush (snr) took US airborne forces off alert. That was done by executive order, was unilateral, paid no attention to issues of verification, and was immediately reciprocated and was 100% successful.

It is noteworthy that it seems that, unnoticed by most of us, Presidents Medvedev and Obama may have already taken a step in the direction of lowering operational readiness by again re-invigorating the idea of a 'Joint Data Exchange Centre' (JDEC) to be located in Moscow.

The original idea of JDEC, which came about in the wake of a brush with the apocalypse that took place in 1995 as a result of the launch of a weather research rocket by Norway that was mistaken by Russian perimeter radar for a US SLBM launched first strike on moscow, and subsequently agreed to by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, was that there should be a facility in which US officers would see what was on Russian radar screens and Russian officers would see what was on US radar screens, and there would be hotlines to everywhere.

JDEC probably would NOT- in the eviscerated form in which it finally was agreed by the US

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

and Russian militaries - take the apocalypse off the agenda. But it might possibly have helped to make it a little less likely.

JDEC has so far been agreed on three times by the US and Russian governments. It has yet to actually happen. Indeed, it would be helpful if it did.

Other Issues Other Meetings

Operational Readiness of nuclear weapons systems wasn't the sole issue to which I paid attention at the UN, though it crosses into many other issues. And First Cttee wasn't the only meeting to which I went.

Early in the peice there was a meeting with Ambassador Libran N. Cabactulan, the Phillipino diplomat who will be chairing the upcoming 2010 NPT Review Conference, a massive responsibility.

As I looked around the meeting room on the 31st floor of the UN building and saw major world policymakers from the UN itself and major NGOs, I thought to myself 'remember where you are - and who you are with'.(and thanks to the amazing Ray Acheson of WILPF for organising this meeting). Libran spelled out his vision for the 2010 review conference and the steps he was taking in terms of pre-meeting consultations with every government in the world to make this vision happen. He (spontaneously and from his side) noted and complimented my work on op status, as I stressed the importance of it in the final declaration of the review conference. (The Phillipines has in the past made good statments on it).

The other major forum I attended was the annual get together of the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament where I made what I hope will be ongoing contacts with Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Bundestag member Uta Zapf, a number of Canadian parliamentarians including Bill Siksay of the NDP, a number of UK parliamentarians, Ambassador Grey (who had been going to accompany us to Tauschers office), and Amb. Hendrik Salander of the Middle Powers Initiative.

At a diplomatic reception in honour of Hendrik Salander it was announced that my friend, Colleague and mentor in all of this, Alyn Ware, had been awarded the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes known as the 'alternative nobel'. Alyn has been instrumental in making many things happen (including the operational readiness resolution) and the planet owes him bigtime. It is richly deserved.

A wider appreciation of the work of First Committee sounds almost like a footnote. I believe that first cttee is immensely important as it is there that every government on the planet puts on record its opinion on matters that affect the survival of our species and much else besides. Our resolution on operational readiness is a case in point.

I did in fact spend many hours simply listening to First Committee presentations by many governments. In spite of the variety of governments and the variety of situations there is a surprising unanimity on matters of nuclear disarmament. There is absolute unanimity, for

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

example, that getting rid of nuclear weapons is a GOOD THING. A surprising number of delegations are prepared to place on the record that they think that nuclear weapons present a threat to human survival (though the NAM group seem more willing to say that than other groups). There were some inspired speeches and some dreary going through the motions (though I'm not sure I exactly recall any of that this time). There is still a feeling of optimism bought about by the Obama administration, tempered by the realisation that while nobody on the floor of the GA wants to see more nuclear weapons, there are nonetheless forces that - diabolical as it seems - DO want that, and who argue for example, that 'nuclear weapons have kept the peace', or that deterrence 'works'. (all of these presentations are on the Reaching Critical Will website)

I have placed a number of such presentations on this (PND's) website including that of the Australian delegation and of Sweden speaking on behalf of the EU.

At one point ambassador Labbe got up and spoke on behalf of, in succession, the six de-alerting governments, a group of South American states and the Chilean government. At one point in what he was technically entitled to make a 45 minute presentation, he noted the role of NGO's, saying that while it was invidious to single out anyone specially he had to acknowledge the role played by amongst others, the Global Security Institute (GSI) MPI, and Nuclear Flashpoints!

A large number of resolutions on nuclear disarmament went through this year as in previous years. Many of them were not exactly new, yet governments - sometimes a 'mere' 2/3-3/4 of all of them sometimes 100% of everyone - consistently tell us all they they do not wish to be toast and that they want measures taken to make that impossible.

The resolutions passed include:

- A number of resolutions on preventing a nuclear arms race in the middle - east
- the NAM resolution, referencing the 13 points of the Year 2000 NPT review conference and various declarations of the NAM group
- Renewed Determination
- The New Agenda resolution. (New Agenda was formerly the cutting edge of nuclear disarmament in the GA but has now lost some of its 'bite'.) Apart from Renewed Determination it is the most widely supported.
- The Malaysian resolution on followup to the 1996 ICJ decision
- Nuclear Weapons Convention
- Reducing Nuclear Dangers.

It would be highly desirable if some of these worthy resolutions could be supported by significant 'western' countries such as Australia, Japan, NZ, Sweden, Switzerland etc, with EoV's if necessary. Much that is truly worthy and important (such as the nuclear weapons convention, ICJ followup, and Reducing Nuclear Dangers) do not receive the support that they should from other than the non-aligned majority of the planet.

In addition, a bewilderingly large number of resolutions on matters other than nuclear weapons, covering small arms and light weapons, conventional arms, space warfare, biological

warfare, were adopted.

An exhaustive list (it is long) of all the resolutions carried by 1st cttee is on the website of Reaching Critical Will. RCW performs an invaluable task in tracking and monitoring them.

Item on JDEC

2009-09-22

<http://www.uspolicy.be/Article.asp?ID=0ff26266-d81f-42c6-8075-01e06d1> 63478

U.S., Russia to Share Warning Data on Missile, Space Launches
Efforts intensify to make U.S.-Russian Joint Data Exchange
Center a reality

By Carlos Aranaga Staff Writer

Washington - A decade after the United States and Russia agreed to the first permanent joint effort to curb the risk of false warnings of ballistic missile attack, the two governments have intensified their efforts to establish a Joint Data Exchange Center (JDEC), as well as to put into place a Pre-Launch Notification System (PLNS).

The JDEC's mission, according to U.S. officials, is to promote confidence between the United States and Russia by mitigating the risk that a retaliatory strike will be launched based on erroneous information caused by a false warning of a ballistic missile attack generated by either the Russian or the U.S. early warning system, U.S. officials told America.gov.

The JDEC will be located in Moscow, with U.S. and Russian military personnel working side by side around the clock, 365 days a year. These personnel will use displays of worldwide information derived from U.S. and Russian early warning sensors on launches of ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles, according to U.S. officials.

The JDEC and PLNS agreements, signed in 2000, represent milestones in the effort to bolster strategic stability between the United States and Russia. The PLNS expands on the exchange of notifications already required by existing arms control agreements such as the 1991 START (Strategic

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

Arms Reduction Treaty) and the 1998 Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement. Besides calling for notice of ballistic missile and space launches, the PLNS agreement also calls for a voluntary mutual sharing of information on falling satellites and on space experiments that might impair the work of early-warning radar systems (the JDEC agreement also calls for such a voluntary sharing of information).

The JDEC will house the PLNS, which will be an Internet-based mechanism for the exchange of U.S. and Russian pre- and post-launch notifications. Once the PLNS is implemented bilaterally, the United States and Russia intend to open it to voluntary participation by interested countries.

U.S. missile defense and space policy experts say the JDEC provides a chance for even greater cooperation by allowing the United States and Russia to work together to report on third-country launches that either may directly threaten, or be misconstrued to threaten, each nation's territory.

U.S. officials say growth in the number of space-faring nations in the nearly 10 years since the JDEC and PLNS agreements were signed make minimizing the consequences of a false attack warning an even more necessary and urgent mission.

Especially in the last decade, the global security environment has become more marked by proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as by ballistic missiles of increasingly greater ranges, sophistication, payloads and lethality. JDEC will be a venue for early-warning analysis and the first full-time U.S.-Russian joint military operation in the strategic arena, U.S. officials say. U.S. military personnel will be able to immediately explain any unexpected launch event or ambiguity to their Russian counterparts, and vice versa, they say.

JDEC and PLNS represent efforts to implement the intentions initially set forth in 1998 by the U.S. and Russian presidents in their Joint Statement on the Exchange of Information on Missile Launches and Early Warning. Work to bring these ideas to fruition slowed in recent years over impasses regarding taxation and liability provisions in the JDEC agreement. U.S. officials have intensified efforts to

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 November 2009 15:17 -

narrow the gaps, and implementation of JDEC and PLNS is currently a part of active discussions with Russia, officials say.

"There are ongoing negotiations to resolve some of the outstanding issues thus far preventing the JDEC and PLNS from being implemented," a U.S. Department of State official said.

"We've discussed this in many bilateral, face-to-face negotiations with the Russian Federation, both in Washington, D.C., as well as in Moscow," the official said. "There's been a flurry of negotiations in 2007 and 2008, and we are now getting back to resolving these issues.

"There has been progress during the Obama administration; we've made key breakthroughs, but still we do not yet have agreement on both the liability and tax issues," the official said.

On the need for confidence-building in areas such as data exchange, as mandated by the 1991 START, the former U.S. Strategic Command commander and current U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff vice chairman, General James E. Cartwright, said to Arms Control Today, "The attributes that you would seek are transparency, the ability to generate warning time, and confidence in what the intentions are of a counterpart."

Finally, U.S. physical site security experts briefed Russian Ministry of Defense counterparts in 2008 regarding post-September 11 physical site security requirements for the JDEC facility. An existing building had been agreed upon in the June 2000 JDEC memorandum of agreement, but it no longer meets increased U.S. security standards.