

NATO, PUTIN, TRUMP, URGED TO REDUCE NUCLEAR WAR RISKS

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 July 2018 19:25 - Last Updated Monday, 09 July 2018 19:27

TUES 10 JULY 2018

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

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In a letter addressed to NATO and to Presidents Trump and Putin, the Human Survival Project, People for Nuclear Disarmament (both based in Sydney Australia), and representatives of the World Future Council(UK) and Initiatives pour Le Desarmement Nucleaire (France), all of them members of the global Abolition2000 working Group on Nuclear Risk Reduction, have urged nuclear risk reduction.

The risk of nuclear war as measured by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists 'doomsday clock', currently stands at 2 'minutes' to 'midnight', where midnight represents the large-scale use of nuclear weapons. Back in 1983, considered the height of the cold war, a year in which the world literally nearly ended twice, the hands of the clock stood at a mere three minutes to 'midnight'. The Bulletin is not the only authority to warn of the likelihood of a nuclear apocalypse: former commanders of US and Russian nuclear forces,

former US defense secretary William Perry, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the Pope have all done so.

The letter urges a number of commonsense measures to reduce the risk of an (accidental or otherwise) apocalypse, including no-first-use commitments, lowering of alert status of nuclear weapon systems, better military-to-military communications, and the establishment of a joint data exchange system in Moscow, agreed by both US and Russian governments four or five times but never implemented.

NATO will meet on the 11th and 12th. Putin and Trump will meet each other in Helsinki on 16th.

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APPEAL ON NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION TO PRESIDENTS PUTIN AND TRUMP,

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NATO MEETING 11-12 JULY

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

ABOLITION 2000 WORKING GROUP ON NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION

Dear NATO Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, and Presidents Trump and Putin:

Last January, as is well known, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, at the advice of its board of sponsors, on which sit nobel prizewinners and respected experts on nuclear weapons risks, moved the hands of its iconic 'doomsday clock', which has monitored how close or otherwise humans are to self-destruction, from three minutes to 'midnight' to a frightening two figurative minutes to 'midnight'.

The Bulletin's Board of Sponsors has not been the only body or person to sound the alarm on rising risks of nuclear war: similar warnings were issued by Mikhail Gorbachev, Pope Francis, former US Defense Secretary Bill Perry, and by former commanders of both US and Russian nuclear missile forces.

Since those warnings have been issued, there have been periods in which the risk of nuclear weapons being used, both between the US and the DPRK, but even more frighteningly, between the US and Russia, have seemed to 'spike', for days, weeks, and even months. Then a breakthrough of some kind takes place and the risks recede for a while, only for the cycle to repeat itself. This cannot go on forever: An indefinite number of spins of the roulette barrel sooner or later will produce a shot.

The use of nuclear weapons between the US and the DPRK would be a catastrophe with global implications, with an immediate body count in excess of all the casualties of the whole of WW-II. The use of nuclear weapons in Europe and Russia (and then likely the US and China) would be a global catastrophe similar in scale to that which wiped out the dinosaurs, in which what we call 'civilization' would end, and in which human survival itself could not be assured. Even if humans as a species did survive, most land-based living species would not.

We wish to express our alarm at the current elevated state of risk of nuclear weapons use. One cannot play American, Russian, or Korean roulette with the species, civilization, and the planet as a whole indefinitely: At some point, our luck will run out. Malfunction, miscalculation, madness malice or malware will produce catastrophe.

We would like to urge both the upcoming July 11-12 meeting of NATO, and the July 16 meeting between Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump to take concrete practical measures that will lower these risks.

Many other appeals and prescriptions for risk reduction, largely overlapping with this one, have been made in recent years and months. We strongly support all of those and draw unashamedly from all of them. These include:

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--All the measures listed in the Abolition 2000 working group on nuclear risk reduction of which this letters author is a co-convener:

<http://www.abolition2000.org/en/nuclear-risk-reduction/>

--The July 10 2016 appeal by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, calling for a lowering of nuclear weapons alert status, or a nuclear weapons stand-down.

<http://www.pnnd.org/article/osce-parliamentary-assembly-calls-nuclear-weapons-stand-down>

--The measures proposed by IDN of France, to diminish the risk of nuclear catastrophe:

<http://www.idn-france.org/2018/06/mesures-urgentes-proposes-idn-eviter-catastrophe-nucleaire/>

--The Appeal by IDN for the removal of tactical nuclear weapons from Europe:

<http://www.abolition2000.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IDN-IT-IS-URGENT-TO-ELIMINATE-NUCLEAR-TACTICAL-WEAPONS-IN-EUROPE.pdf>

--The Appeal to Leaders of Nuclear-Armed states by women parliamentarians, organized by Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (PNND)

<http://www.pnnd.org/article/common-security-sustainable-and-nuclear-weapon-free-world>

The policy prescriptions contained in all of these appeals are mutually reinforcing and overlapping, and it is possible and necessary to support all of them, which we do most strongly.

There are however a few obvious measures that should be discussed both at the NATO summit and at the Trump-Putin summit.

--Tactical nuclear weapons, whether in Kaliningrad, Crimea, Turkey, Italy or Germany, constitute a kind of nuclear 'tripwire'. Considered more 'usable' than strategic nuclear weapons, their use is nonetheless likely to lead on to the massive use of strategic nuclear weapons. Many of them have yields not meaningfully distinguishable from strategic nuclear weapons. Their use should be made more difficult not easier.

--The conducting of exercises with nuclear capable military equipment, and in particular the conducting of 'mirror-imaged' or 'back-to back' Russian and NATO exercises in relatively close proximity is incredibly dangerous and provocative. In the recent past however, a number of such exercises have taken place. The mind boggles at the potential for disaster, should something have gone wrong or should there have been serious misunderstandings of each others intentions. Such exercises should never take place.

--In the past, Russia and NATO have had relatively good and respectful military-to-military communications and a relatively high level of mutual transparency. This is no longer the case. Military to military communications both on an informal and personal basis, and more formally, need to be restored and upgraded.

--The Idea for a Joint Data Exchange Centre in Moscow, discussed between the US and

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Russia since 1998, and reaffirmed as an intention three or four times at least, should finally be implemented. The possibility of NATO and China also participating should be explored.

--Russia and the US, followed by (or preceded by) NATO nuclear weapon states should declare that they will not use nuclear weapons first. (No First Use). Currently India and China have such formal policies.

--Nuclear postures that mandate either various forms of 'launch on warning' or 'launch under (presumed) attack' should be abolished. It is far too easy for computer or sensor malfunction to produce false attack warnings that, if believed, initiate the apocalypse, and this has come close to taking place in both Russia and the USA on a frighteningly large number of occasions. Semantic debates about whether US forces are 'really' on 'hair trigger' do nothing to reduce the very real risks of a nuclear exchange bought about by nothing more significant than sun reflected off high clouds over North Dakota that looked to Soviet surveillance satellite systems exactly like a series of launches (1983), a research rocket that looked like an SLBM launch (1995) and software and hardware glitches that looked to US systems like thousands of incoming warheads.

In the slightly longer run, assuming we are all still here, the need is to:

--Extend the New START treaty so that we are not in a position where nothing constrains nuclear weapons expansion on either side. Absent a New START extension, this is the position we will be in, risking a new/renewed nuclear arms race.

--Adopt nuclear postures and security policies whose entire purpose is to diminish the role of nuclear weapons.

These would go some way to making thinkable, and possible, the fulfillment of the nuclear-armed states Art VI NPT obligations.

Signed:

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