

THIS should be at the top of your Political Agenda

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 12 November 2018 15:41 - Last Updated Monday, 12 November 2018 15:42

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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

<http://www.pndnsw.org.au/>

HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

<https://www.facebook.com/Human-Survival-Project-388802504634024/?eid=ARAIbfTPOP9RK3mdhrCkqLhgdo1kGhMdq8J9qVCuajKDLU1h32Vpd5IEuu8k8UCAwRYD0U3GMmup-eW5>

PARLIAMENTARIANS AND NUCLEAR WAR RISKS – MEMO TO ALL PARLIAMENTARIANS

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35 YEARS AGO THE WORLD NEARLY ENDED (TWICE). NOW, NUCLEAR WAR RISK AS IS HIGH AS IT'S EVER BEEN.

SURELY, THIS IS THE ISSUE THAT 'TRUMPS' ALL OTHER ISSUES

35 years ago last week, NATO's 'Able Archer' military exercises, which included a simulated nuclear strike on the then Soviet Union, faded away. Only in subsequent months did it become clear that the simulation of a nuclear strike on the Soviet Union had been seen by the KGB and Politburo and senior soviet military as being likely to be not a simulation, but the real thing. Had the Soviets been completely convinced that Able Archer had been the real thing, they would have sought to hit the button first with a pre-emptive – (or a pre-pre-emptive) – strike.

Back on September 26 1983, Colonel Stanislav Petrov had already once saved the world from incineration as sunlight reflecting off high clouds over US launch sites was mistaken for a series of launches. Had he not been on duty that night we'd not be here to talk about it. His story is told in the movie 'The Man Who Saved the World'.

Now, with the massive Trident Juncture NATO exercise in Norway, and with Russian threats to conduct missile tests right in the middle of it (seemingly), and the nuclear missile cruiser Pyotr Velikhy headed right into the middle of the exercise area (seemingly), things look awfully like they did back in 1983, when the end of the world was, in the most literal sense, on the agenda. Back in '83, the apocalypse was maybe tomorrow or next week, or the week after. Now it can come from a tweet.

Nuclear weapons, disarmament, and the possibility of the 'end of the world' were, however, on the lips of at least everyone that I knew. We knew it was on the agenda, and there were massive protests – in Sydney with hundreds of thousands, in New York one one occasion with over a million, throughout the entire 80's. It was amongst the top political issues, and was extensively debated in the Parliaments of the world. Indeed this went on through the '90s and into the early 2000's, with the Australian Senate adopting more antinuclear resolutions than any other legislature in the world.

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In 1983, the 'Doomsday Clock' the best indicator the world has as to the likelihood of the world as we know it ending, was at three notional 'minutes' to 'midnight', 'midnight' being a civilization-ending (and possibly species-ending) nuclear conflict.

Now, the 'Doomsday Clock', hands solemnly moved by committees of nobel prizewinners, stands at two minutes to midnight. It has only ever been there once before, in 1954, when the first thermonuclear weapons were tested in quick succession by the US and the USSR and US first strikes against the USSR were seriously considered.

The terrifying days and near catastrophe of the 1983 Able Archer exercises led to the eventual signing in 1987, (by Reagan and Gorbachev) of the INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) Treaty, the very same treaty that John Bolton and Trump now want to trash. A now frail Mikhail Gorbachev has commented that – with Russian understatement – getting rid of the INF treaty 'is not the work of a great mind'. Gorbachev has also in the last week or so issued dire warnings of a nuclear arms race and increased risk of nuclear war.

Former US Senator Sam Nunn, founder of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, has commented that: “...the chance of a terrible miscalculation involving nuclear weapons is greater today than 10 or 20 years ago, and possibly even worse than during the height of the Cold War,”

While Professor Paul Dibb of ANU, former chief of Australian intelligence, was told by a very senior (retired) Russian missile forces commander that:

“Paul, you know, the situation now in terms of our relations at the strategic nuclear level with America are at least as bad as the Cold War. We're not talking to each other at all; we're not agreeing on intrusive verifications and counting rules of how many ballistic missiles with how many warheads.”

"And don't think you Australians will be free of this. With regard to Pine Gap, you would find that in the event of Russian nuclear war with America, nuclear missiles will fly in all directions." (emphasis mine)

What is most frightening about the current situation however, is not just how objectively close we may or may not be to a catastrophe, an apocalypse, or whatever, terrifying though that SHOULD be.

One hopes and prays in these matters to be proven wrong simply by still being here, next week, next month, and hopefully next year. One has plans that involve the world – and oneself – still being in existence. It was thus in the 1980s also.

What is truly frightening is precisely the lack of fear, the lack of concern, and the lack of any awareness over an issue that, surely, 'trumps' all other issues whatsoever in importance.

What use is a national disability scheme, the worlds best (or worst) childcare, concern about refugees (or about keeping people out), or even the state of the economy, if the world is cold and dark and most of us have been vaporized (or are freezing and starving in the dark after most others have been vaporized)?

There are a bunch of things that ordinary people and Parliamentarians can DO. (Other than

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pretend the issue is not important, or that relative trivia ARE important.)

The first is simply to acknowledge the existence and importance of the nuclear risk issue, and act – and speak – accordingly. The risk of nuclear war is a life-and-death matter and needs to be treated as such. Nuclear weapons, the risk of nuclear war, and nuclear risk reduction and nuclear disarmament/abolition have to be at the top of political and parliamentary agendas.

Why oh why do the sex-lives of certain politicians or the citizenship status of others regularly 'trump' the potential end of civilization instead of the other way round? Parliamentarians above all must have a sense of what is truly of importance. Along with climate change, nuclear weapons is an issue that can end everything we are familiar with, yet little or no attention is paid to it by our legislatures. It doesn't have to be this way and it hasn't always been this way.

Parliamentarians above all, are in a position to give nuclear risks the genuine importance that the issue merits.

The second thing Parliamentarians can do is to press for measures that would really reduce the risk of an (accidental or otherwise) nuclear apocalypse. These include the lowering of the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, No-First-Use policies, improved military to military communication, an end to exercises that might be misunderstood as the first shot in armageddon, or that might escalate into just that if enough things go wrong. But to do this Parliamentarians must first of all acknowledge that these are serious possibilities, but possibilities that their own actions can make a difference to. Yes, the apocalypse is on the agenda. Yes, we can help to take it OFF the agenda.

A comprehensive list of commonsense risk reduction measures is here:

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

Senator Penny Wong's remarks to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) on Oct 15 on nuclear risk reduction are thoughtful and worthy of note. Hopefully they will lead to further parliamentary initiatives:

<http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/resource/senator-the-hon-penny-wong-shadow-minister-f-or-foreign-affairs-address-the-disarmament-challenge-in-a-time-of-disruption-at-aiia-national-coference-2018/>

Finally, many parliamentarians have signed the ICAN 'pledge' to support the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons' (TPNW). This is very important, but it isn't by any means the only thing that can or should be done.

As we see, risk reduction is critical. Reducing the immediate, short-term, risk of nuclear war may mean the difference between being around for the TPNW to take effect, and not being around in which case the TPNW won't do any good. At the same time, the safest nuclear weapon is undoubtedly one that doesn't exist at all. Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (PNND) and Abolition-2000 have compiled a comprehensive list of risk reduction measures. These range from ways to raise the subject in Parliaments to major legislative initiatives and reorientation of government policy. All of these are necessary

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and helpful.(below)

<http://www.pnnd.org/article/pnnd-releases-action-plan-nuclear-weapon-free-world>

I would be most happy to see any of you at a mutually convenient time and discuss the issue of nuclear risk, either in Canberra or in Sydney.

Let us give the existential issue of nuclear risk the importance it truly deserves.

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