

NO FIRST USE AND NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION

<https://nofirstuse.global/>

My involvement in nuclear risk reduction now goes back over 20 years to 1999/2000, when I coordinated a global campaign to take nuclear weapons off high alert over the Y2K rollover, a campaign that culminated in resolutions in the European Parliament (and other parliaments), and a letter signed by over 600 NGOs and parliamentarians.

In 2007, I was involved (with many others some of whom are now in this webinar) in a successful campaign to get the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution on lowering the alert status of nuclear weapon systems. The relevant resolution is now adopted by UNGA every alternate year.

However, concern over the immediate-term risks of nuclear war has spiked over the most recent years and months, reaching a peak with the announcement in 2020 that the Doomsday Clock, the nearest thing we have to a real barometer of the risk that nuclear weapons will be used by accident or (God forbid) by design, was to be set at 100 seconds to 'midnight', where 'midnight' represents of course, the apocalypse. In doing this, the Bulletin has to juggle multiple apocalypses these days – including catastrophic climate change, disruption of cyberspace, EMP (electromagnetic pulse) and geomagnetic storms, large incoming space objects, and my favourite for sheer theological hubris, 'experiments in artificial universe creation'.

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Written by John Hallam

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For the Doomsday Clock's take on nuclear risk right now see:

<https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>

The greatest immediate term risk comes from the likelihood of nuclear weapons use, which can end the world in approximately 90 minutes with little or no warning – followed by the slow(er) (but still way too fast) 'burn' of climate change.

And that risk has become much more prominent recently. It is arguable that when Russian military advanced on Ukraine last May and June, we may have dodged a (nuclear) bullet. Unlike the India-China border confrontation, in which both parties had No First Use policies, and in which the question of escalation to the nuclear level did not arise, the possibility of a direct NATO-Russia confrontation was accompanied by constant warnings of the possibility of escalation to nuclear weapons use.

Concern over the possibility of war between NATO and Russia goes back to 2014, when the following fictionalised documentary was produced:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWqWai_H_9o

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In December 2020, Abolition 2000 working Group on Nuclear Risk Reduction wrote to President-Elect Biden on nuclear risk reduction and No First Use:

<https://www.abolition2000.org/en/news/2020/12/25/usa-president-elect-biden-urged-to-take-action-on-nuclear-risk-reduction-and-disarmament/>

Indeed, so concerned were some of those who went on to organise the Global No First Use campaign, that we wrote a letter of our own to Biden and Putin urging caution and that steps back from the brink be taken. That letter is here: <http://www.pndnsw.org.au/articles/flashpoints/453-letter-to-biden-putin-zelensky-re-ukraine-nuclear-war.html>

That letter, signed by just myself and Mr Aaron Tovish proved to be a prelude to a much more accessible one written by the steering committee here and one or two others, and that garnered over 1000 signatures including from former UN undersecretary-generals, admirals, generals, serving and retired politicians, retired prime ministers and foreign ministers, and so on.

This letter can be found at:

http://baselpeaceoffice.org/sites/default/files/imce/articles/2021/open_letter_on_no_first_use_to_presidents_putin_biden_for_the_june_16_summit.pdf

The depth and breadth of concern over the risk of nuclear war is clear from the nature of the people who have signed this letter. Key amongst the things asked for in it was a reaffirmation of the Reagan-Gorbachev joint statement that 'A Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought', also requested by other letters (e.g. the one from Pugwash), written for the same occasion. We note that this has indeed been done – the Putin -Biden joint statement did reaffirm Reagan-Gorbachev's joint statement of 1985.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5658>

With the Geneva meeting of Biden and Putin, we have taken a tiny step back from the brink,

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enough to move back the hands of the Doomsday Clock by seconds. The destruction of civilisation by large scale (accidental or otherwise) nuclear weapons use remains the most pressing immediate term threat to everyone and everything.

Nuclear Risk Reduction and Abolition are the twin means whereby this particular apocalypse can be made less likely or removed entirely from the agenda.

No First Use remains an obvious way in which states with large nuclear arsenals (the US and Russia with over 90% of the worlds nuclear warheads, and increasingly India-Pakistan and China) – can make escalation of conventional conflicts to the level of nuclear warfare less likely. If one side agrees not to shoot first, and the other side does likewise, then in theory at least, the exchange of nuclear weapons ought never to take place.

Many memos and letters related to nuclear risk reduction can be found on the website of People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND) at:

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

Abolition 2000's nuclear risk reduction working group which canvasses a wide menu of risk reduction measures is at:

<https://www.abolition2000.org/en/working-groups/nuclear-risk-reduction/>

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