

## AS UN VOTES TO TAKE NUKES OFF HIGH ALERT, US LOSES CONTROL OF 50 MISSILES

Written by John Hallam  
Wednesday, 10 November 2010 12:34 -

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### PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT NUCLEAR FLASHPOINTS PROJECT

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As the UN voted 144 to 3 this week in favour of taking strategic nuclear warheads off high alert status so that computer error and human panic and miscalculation would have a harder time in bringing about the accidental end of civilisation and 95% of complex land-based life forms, a computer glitch at Warren Airforce Base took 50 Minuteman missiles out of control for 45 minutes.

According to PND's John Hallam, who together with Mr Steven Starr of PSR, Colonel Valery Yarynich (Ret) formerly of the Russian and Soviet missile forces, and the NZ and Swiss disarmament ambassadors, held a workshop on operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems at the UN

Prior to the voting in First Committee:

"It is just as well that this particular computer glitch meant that the missiles actually could NOT be fired. On at least one previous terrifying occasion, a practice launch sequence went out of control and would not stop, and heavy military vehicles were driven on top of silo doors to make a launch physically impossible. We literally owe our very existence to US and Russian military officers who amidst wailing sirens and flashing lights in nuclear launch control centres, did the right thing and decided not to press buttons."

"This incident shows the absolute need to do as the UN has urged the US and Russian governments to do in a 144-3 vote on Wednesday and in two other votes the previous day."

"Lowering the alert status of nuclear weapon systems will literally take the apocalypse off the agenda - and right now it is firmly on there."

"One of the things that our panel at the UN showed with absolute clarity was that arguments to the effect that lowering operational readiness might decrease strategic stability are absolutely false. Computer simulations of nuclear war scenarios performed by Colonel Yarynich show clearly that lowering operational readiness as recommended by the Canberra Commission back in 1996, by the Blix Commission in 2006, and by the ICNND last year, are an absolute necessity."

"To maintain a total of 5000 warheads on high alert, ready to launch in less than two minutes at a few keystrokes, is a global self-destruct mechanism that can at any time undo billions of years of evolution. The recent incident at Warren AFB puts this in high relief."

"Wednesday's vote at the UN shows that the overwhelming majority of governments think that

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too, and don't want to be toast - or to freeze in the darkness afterwards."

"Let's do the sensible thing and take the apocalypse off the agenda."

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#### STATEMENT ON OPERATIONAL READINESS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS SYSTEMS UN FIRST COMMITTEE OCTOBER 2010

Yesterday and the day before (Tuesday 26 and Wednesday 27 Oct), a number of resolutions went through United Nations First Committee that called for nuclear weapons to be taken OFF high-alert or 'Launch on Warning', and called for longer times for decision-makers to make decisions that might have truly apocalyptic consequences.

Operational Readiness or operating status was the subject of or was included in a number of resolutions, notably the NZ/Switzerland/Chile/Malaysia/Nigeria resolution entitled 'operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems', India's 'Reducing Nuclear Danger' resolution, and the Japan/Australia resolution on total elimination of nuclear weapons. All in different ways called for a lowering in the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems and for increases in decision-making time.

Of these the resolution that created the most 'buzz' was the NZ/Switzerland/Chile/Malaysia/Nigeria one on operational readiness.

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Arising in part as a result of an appeal coordinated by PND Nuclear Flashpoints signed by 44 nobels, the resolution was preceded by a panel at which the governments of Switzerland and NZ were represented as well as nuclear weapons experts Colonel Valery Yarynich (30 years in the Soviet/Russian missile forces), and Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists and activists Steven Starr and John Hallam.

The Operational Readiness resolution this time, was adopted by 144 votes to 3, with 22 abstentions - this compared favourably to the last time it was presented in 2008, when it garnered 133 votes to 3 with 33 abstentions.

Notable changes in vote from 'abstain' to 'yes' included Canada, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia and China..

Only three countries continue to vote 'no' to a lowering in operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems - the US, France, and the UK. France and the UK have however, already lowered the operational readiness of their nuclear weapon systems.

The stakes involved in lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems couldn't be higher. Every incident in which the use of nuclear weapons has been a possibility has involved the possible use not of one or two missiles but of the main strategic forces of a nuclear superpower. Recent modelling of the results of the destruction of cities that would result from that indicate that it would create freezing conditions for years if not decades, that would place human survival itself in question.

The voting pattern in First Committee is likely to be replicated in the General Assembly itself in December. Taken together with the massive support for nuclear disarmament more widely, it indicates both that the overwhelming majority of governments and people want to get rid of nuclear weapons altogether, and that they see maintaining nuclear weapons on high alert as a global self-destruct mechanism that absolutely needs to be dismantled.

The wish of the overwhelming majority of the planet is absolutely clear.

The world has spoken. It wants nuclear weapons taken of high alert and gotten rid of.

That a tiny minority - perhaps no more than a dozen or so people in the Pentagon and the Kremlin - continue to hold the entire world at risk - is mind - boggling.

It is now up to people in the Duma and the Congress to show true leadership by standing up to their respective militaries - or to tiny cliques within their militaries - and taking the apocalypse off the agenda.

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Congresspeople, Duma Members, it is over to you.

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Sixty-fifth session First Committee Agenda item 99 General and complete disarmament:

Decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems

Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland: draft resolution Decreasing the operational

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readiness of nuclear weapons systems

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 62/36 of 5 December 2007 and 63/41 of 2 December 2008,

Recalling also that the maintenance of nuclear weapons on high alert was a feature of cold war nuclear postures, and welcoming the increased confidence and transparency since the cessation of the cold war,

Concerned that, notwithstanding the end of the cold war, several thousand nuclear weapons remain on high alert, ready to be launched within minutes,

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Noting the continuing engagement in multilateral disarmament forums in support of further reductions to the operational status of nuclear weapons systems,

Recognizing that the maintenance of nuclear weapons systems at a high level of readiness increases the risk of the unintentional or accidental use of such weapons, which would have catastrophic consequences,

Recognizing also that reductions in deployments and the lowering of operational status contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as to the process of nuclear disarmament, through the enhancement of confidence-building and transparency measures and a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies, Welcoming the steps taken by some States to enhance the environment to support further reductions in nuclear weapons, including de-targeting initiatives and increasing the amount of preparation time required for deployment, and in this connection, welcoming the commitment made by the United States to maximise Presidential decision time and to consider other steps that may diminish further the possibility of nuclear launches resulting from accidents, unauthorized actions, or misperceptions,

1. Welcomes the adoption by consensus of the Eighth Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of "Conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions" including the commitments of the nuclear-weapon States to promptly engage with a view to, inter alia, consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States in further reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems in ways that promote international stability and

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security and looks forward to the nuclear-weapon States' report in terms of that undertaking to the NPT Review Conference Preparatory Committee in 2014.

2. Calls for further practical steps to be taken to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, with a view to ensuring that all nuclear weapons are removed from high alert status;

3. Urges States to update the General Assembly on progress made in the implementation of the present resolution;

4. Decides to remain seized of the matter.