

WANTED IN UKRAINE DIALOGUE: COMMONSENSE AND RESTRAINT

Written by John Hallam

Thursday, 04 September 2014 13:40 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 21:54

WED 3 SEPT 2014

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

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NUCLEAR THREATS POTENTIALLY JEOPARDISE HUMAN SURVIVAL

PUTIN PRESENCE IN BRISBANE G20 'ESSENTIAL'

What the Ukraine crisis above all requires, on all sides of the conflict is restraint and balance. Russia as well as Ukraine has genuine security concerns. A Russia-NATO clash could all too easily escalate to the use of nuclear weapons.

A large-scale US/Russia nuclear exchange would destroy the structures of what we call civilisation in milliseconds, while the ensuing nuclear winter could threaten human survival.

It was Putin who warned darkly last Friday that it 'should be remembered that Russia is a nuclear power'. Indeed so. But both the US and Russian missile forces regularly practice for the apocalypse. And while the nuclear threat has long been relegated in the public consciousness to the terrors and errors of the cold war the fact is that it never went away. Russia and the US between them hold over 90% of global nuclear arsenals. Each of them maintains just under 1000 warheads in a status in which they can be launched in less than a minute. False alarms in both the US and Russia have come close to bringing about accidental nuclear war on nearly a dozen occasions.

Russia has always had deep and clear historical and strategic interests in the Ukraine. A Ukraine dominated by NATO or by an anti-Russian government is absolutely bound to provoke a strong negative reaction in Moscow, right or wrong. Russian attempts to 'interfere' in what was in the tenth century the very birthplace of the Russian state, are less surprising than US interference in Cuba in the 1960s. Russia, rightly or wrongly will always regard what takes place in Ukraine as affecting a core strategic interest, just as the US would see what takes place in Mexico and Canada as of central strategic importance.

Sanctions are therefore guaranteed to fail, and likely to backfire. Russia is sure to bear whatever cost it deems necessary to protect what it sees as a core security interest. And it is Russia, not the

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West, that determines what Russia sees as a core security interest.

What is astonishing about the entire Ukrainian crisis is that little attempt is made by the NATO powers, with the exception of Germany, to envisage what it might look like to Russian eyes, and anyone who does so is deemed a Russian sympathiser. Yet to do so is surely common sense. To understand what things look like to Russia does not make Russia 100% right, but it might provide essential information that would enable realistic and commonsense-based negotiations to take place.

Barring President Putin from the G20 meeting in Brisbane in November is singularly unhelpful. Putin's presence in Brisbane amongst the G20 must be seen as absolutely essential. How else is rational dialogue to take place?

The repeated calls for 'firm action' in the face of so-called 'aggression' are worse than unhelpful: they are downright dangerous, and verge on the lunatic.

Meeting threats with threats in the name of 'firmness' merely serves to escalate the crisis. And escalation could lead inexorably to an utterly catastrophic outcome. Surely it does not take genius (or Russophilia) to see this, but, again, rationality and common-sense are lacking thus far.

It is not simply Putin who is playing nuclear roulette with the entire planet. Both sides of the conflict are complicit in doing so. And any attempt to get Putin to see things 'our' way without us seeing things his way is calculated to fail, potentially catastrophically.

Common-sense negotiations leading to a diplomatically neutral Ukraine, with or without its troublesome eastern sector, and that (above all) recognise and truly meet Russians deep security concerns (more or less as Russia defines them) over its all too real semi-encirclement by NATO, would provide an obvious way out. Context-blind calls for 'firmness', larded with threats and sanctions, will likely lead either nowhere or, rather worse, to the abyss.

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MON 14 APRIL 2014
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT
PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

DISARMAMENT ORGANIZATIONS WORLDWIDE WARN OBAMA/PUTIN OVER UKRAINE NUCLEAR WAR HAZARDS

Nuclear disarmament organizations worldwide, in a letter arguably representing up to a billion people and certainly representing millions, have written to presidents Putin and Obama, warning of the dangers of escalation inherent in the Ukraine crisis.

The letter has been signed by organizations, some of whom have memberships in the millions, and at least one of which (Mayors For Peace), arguably represents up to a billion people. Signatories range from relatively small Australia-based People for Nuclear Disarmament, who did the overall coordination for the letter, to Mayors for Peace, representing cities worldwide, to International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (Nobel Peace prize 1985), to former UN undersecretary for Disarmament Jayantha Dhanapala. A number of parliamentarians also signed.

The letter argues that, as the United States and Russia between them continue to hold 95% of all the worlds nuclear warheads and as each of them continues to maintain just under 1000 warheads each in a status in which they can be launched in less than a minute, the ultimate consequences of unlimited escalation of a Russia/NATO conflict, should there be one, could be truly apocalyptic.

According to a PND/Human Survival Project spokesperson:

“We aren't saying the world's going to end tomorrow, or even that this is the most likely outcome. All we are saying is that the probability of such an outcome with US and Russian nuclear weapons kept in a ready-to-fire status at all times, is 'non-zero', though (hopefully) low.”

“A crisis such as the current Ukraine crisis makes it higher, maybe as high as 5-10% though this is a possibly wild guesstimate.”

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“Hostilities between NATO and Russian forces, even without direct US involvement, would make it still higher.”

“The results of such a conflict, should it ever take place, would be the complete destruction of what we call civilization, a nuclear winter with temperatures colder than the last ice-age lasting for decades, and would make human survival itself questionable.”

“What is required is a climbdown from the confrontational postures being taken by both sides, a commitment to non-military solutions that respect the actual wishes of all involved, both Ukrainians and Russians, and above all a commitment to take US and Russian nuclear forces off the high alert that has for decades held the entire planet hostage, and to get rid of nuclear weapons completely.”

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The below has been faxed to President Putin (Obama no longer has a fax), to the US and Russian Geneva and NY UN missions, to Kerry at various numbers, to Lavrov at various numbers, and to the House Strategic Forces subcommittee

NUCLEAR DANGERS IN UKRAINE CRISIS

Dear Presidents Putin and Obama, Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov:

The undersigned people and groups wish to draw your attention, if your own advisers have not already done so, to the grave dangers of escalation and miscalculation that could flow from the rapidly-developing crisis over Crimea and the Ukraine.

The very fact that you find yourselves in this situation underscores a

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fatal flaw in the theory of nuclear deterrence and the danger of relying upon it. Deterrence is mistakenly extolled for instilling caution in international affairs; moderation and predictability, not brinkmanship, are supposed to be everyone's watchword. And yet escalatory actions have followed one upon another -- a pattern witnessed in other crises as well. Given this apparently uncontrollable urge to one-upmanship and the world-threatening nature of nuclear war, it is the height of recklessness that the escalatory ladder is topped off by nuclear war.

Having the threat of nuclear war feature in any way in this crisis only worsens it. Each and every nuclear armed party involved in this crisis should state unequivocally that the 'nuclear option' is absolutely ruled OUT. Rather, all parties should emphasise the many points of mutual benefit that favour the pursuit of de-escalation and conflict resolution.

To give the preceding concrete meaning and to safeguard civilisation and much else, immediate steps should be taken to de-alert the nuclear arsenals. It is in times of crisis that accidents and unauthorised action become the most likely. During the Cuban Missile crisis there were several incidences that brought the world even closer to the brink of nuclear war than either Khrushchev or Kennedy wanted or realised at the time. The same was true of the crisis in Europe over the deployment of medium range missiles.

Your two countries together possess about 95% of the world's nuclear warheads. Each of you maintain just under 1000 warheads each at a state of readiness in which they can be launched, according to Russian military sources, in 'a few dozens of seconds'. Those warheads are meant to be aimed primarily at each other, and yet their use would spell the end of civilisation. This subject was discussed at length in the Nayarit, Mexico, conference of 13-14 February which your two governments refused to attend, though 146 other governments did so. After an immediate body count of over a billion, subsequent global climatic effects could make human survival questionable, with ice age conditions lasting as long as 30 years, according to the presentations made at Nayarit by Professor Alan Robock and to the U.S. Congress in Washington by Dr. Ira Helfand.

Your nuclear arsenals continue to impose profound existential insecurity upon the world as a whole. That nuclear weapons give you a perceived but unrealistic sense of security vis a vis one another must not blind you to the utter recklessness of holding so much at risk-- most of which is not even 'yours'! You have no right to do that.

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Looking beyond this crisis, a policy of ruling out ANY use of nuclear weapons should be universally adopted.

Having been de-alerted, your arsenals should remain de-alerted until they are disarmed.

In short, we urge you to find in this crisis an opportunity to prepare for living in a nuclear weapon free world, by dealing with it strictly in non-nuclear terms. We will all be much more secure when such a world has been established, and human survival has thus been secured.

Thank you.

Signed:

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Joe Wolf, Coogee, Australia,

Chris Hamer, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Sydney Australia,

Claude Mostowyk, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Peace and Justice Centre, Sydney Aust,

Bronwyn Marks, Fmr Chair, Hiroshima Day Committee, NSW Australia,

Dr Robert Hunter, Past President, Scientists Against Nuclear Arms, Univ. Sydney, Australia,

Senator Christine Milne, Leader, Australian Greens,

Jill Hall, MP, NSW,

John Hinchcliffe, President, NZ Peace Foundation,

Marion Hancock, NZ,

Barney Richards, New Zealand Peace Council, Aotearoa/NZ

Junko Abe, Ikata People Against MOX, Japan

Hiro Umebayashi, Peace Depot, Yokohama, Japan,

Prof Takao Takahara, International Peace Research Institute

Wilfred D'Sousa, Indian Social Action Forum, Delhi, India

Sukla Sen, EKTA (Committee for Communal Amity), Mumbai, India,

Sudha Reddy, Forum for Ethics and Responsibilities, Bangalore, India,

Prema Verma, Jharkhand Alternative Development Forum, Ranchi, India,

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Joan Russow, Global Compliance Project, Victoria, BC, Canada,

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