

NOT WW-III (YET)?

Written by John Hallam
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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

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DID WE SURVIVE THE SYRIA ATTACK?
PLEASE, NO ESCALATION

It might be too early to tell for sure if the world has survived the attack on purported Syrian chemical weapon installations without escalating into WW-III.

It would be nice to think we have. I have plans for the coming week that a global nuclear apocalypse would ruin.

However, though the apocalypse does not look imminent as of now, (I hope) Russia HAS vaguely threatened 'consequences'. We don't know what they have in mind yet. Hopefully not WW-III right now.

Even assuming absolutely nothing happens in the short term, Russia is sufficiently angry with the west that a further deterioration in relationships seems inevitable. This makes a 'gotterdammerung' of some kind more likely though never of course inevitable.

It's doubtful that the Assad 'regime' has learned anything at all from the incident.

And the worst lesson of all is that which Donald Trump may draw from this – that he can tempt fate, dice with the possibility of WW-III – and 'get away with' it.

Assuming we have 'gotten away with' an attack on Syria in the face of warnings by Russia, we have humiliated them at a time when doing so is the last thing we should be doing. Our relations with Russia desperately need improving not worsening.

And the strike has done nothing to help those who have been harmed by Assad's use of chemical weapons. It may have marginally degraded Assad's capability to manufacture those weapons, but it's not apparent that it has truly affected his calculus in employing them.

Finally, it has been a spin of the Russian/American (nuclear) roulette wheel. This can never be wise. Assuming nothing horrible is coming down the track from Russia – perhaps due to wiser policies from them, or at least a more realistic apprehension of the world – it will have taught Donald that he can tempt fate without consequences. This is not a 'lesson' anyone should learn.

This time, though it's probably too early to be sure, there may have been no immediately disastrous consequences. (Though the US 'doomsday plane' HAS been launched, just in case, and threat levels marginally raised, while in Russia, TV programs have instructed people what to do in case of nuclear war, and troop movements have taken place).

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But the Roulette game does involve real nuclear warheads and one day one of them will go off.

Whatever the temptation to posture and grandstand, policies of restraint and wisdom are called for where the use of nuclear weapons might come into play. Nobody has been displaying any of those qualities. Instead there is chest thumping and foolish bravado.

Countries will be meeting from 23April to 4 May at the UN in Geneva in the NPT Committee meeting, and on 14-16May at the UN in New York in the High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament.

These meetings are an opportunity to take essential steps to lower the risk of an accidental (or otherwise) nuclear war, and finally to take the apocalypse completely off the agenda by universal signature and ratification of the Nuclear Prohibition Treaty. If there are no nuclear weapons, there can be no nuclear apocalypse. If nuclear risk reduction measures are taken there is less likely to be one.

We urge all Governments to take immediate steps to lower nuclear risk and to eliminate nuclear weapons completely.

The author will be attending the NPT meeting in Geneva and delivering a statement from NGOs on reducing nuclear risks. He will then attend the High Level Conference in New York.

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