

## **Speech for Sept 26, International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

Written by John Hallam

Saturday, 21 September 2019 16:15 -

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## **Speech for Sept 26, International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

**(Delivered Sept 21, International Day of Peace, Martin Place Sydney)**

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I want to talk about a day thats just 5 days down the track from today, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Because the two days are so close they are often marked at the same time.

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Sept 26 has officially been the UN recognized International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons since a General Assembly resolution in December 2013 â 30 years after the Sept 26 1983 event it commemorates.

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What nearly happened on Sept 26 1983?

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The world nearly ended, that's what happened. In fact it came close to ending twice that rather eventful year - it nearly ended once again in early November '83, with the NATO 'Able Archer' exercises. Able Archer was a rehearsal for WW-III. The problem was that the Kremlin did not think it was a mere rehearsal. We owe our survival through that event to a double-agent embedded in the highest echelons of NATO. He's still in jail for having leaked NATO battle plans to the Kremlin (thereby showing the Kremlin that Able Archer WAS a mere rehearsal not the real thing). He deserves the Nobel.

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What took place on Sept 26<sup>th</sup> 1983 is best portrayed (with human interest and even a tragic love story) in the Movie 'The Man Who Saved the World'. (Google it).

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Basically the story is this:

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Colonel Stan Petrov (the hero) is on duty on the graveyard shift at Serpukhov-15, an early warning satellite ground station outside Moscow. He isn't normally scheduled to be on duty that night - he's swapped his shift with someone else who has rung in sick. Rumor has it the guy was having a birthday party. Whatever, his mate wanted to be someplace other than deep underground watching radar screens and waiting (hopefully in vain) for the world to end.

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Soon after Colonel Stan started what was expected to be an uneventful night however, sirens started to wail, lights flashed and a big screen lit up showing the US had launched.

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The apocalypse was (according to the computer) approaching at 3 times the speed of sound and would arrive in roughly 20 minutes. If it was real they could expect to die.

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Had the person who was normally on watch been doing it that night, being junior to Colonel Stan he'd have 'gone by the book', buttons would have been pressed and an unstoppable computerized sequence would have kicked in launching between 10 and 15,000 warheads at the US and its allies including Australia.

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However, the Colonel had a feeling in his gut that there was a mistake somewhere...something wasn't quite right.

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At that time it was just a hunch.

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He picked up the red phone and said confidently 'I am transmitting false data'.

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'Are you sure? Said the voice at the other end sounding not at all confident.

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'Yes' lied Colonel Stan. He wasn't at all sure. The next 20 minutes as they ticked out, were the most stressful a human can endure.

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The terrifying minutes ticked out. Nothing happened. There were no incoming missiles. Men wept.

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Rumor has it that later on the Colonel downed a bottle of vodka. His immediate superior, General Votintsev, arrived in the bunker, demanding to know (a) how come the world had nearly ended (b) why it hadn't. He suggested Colonel Stan should get a medal.

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It turned out to have been sunlight reflecting off a highly unusual formation of vertical clouds over US launch sites that looked to Soviet surveillance satellites, exactly like US launches.

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Had Colonel Stan not been on duty that night, we'd have been toast â€œ courtesy of a glitch in satellite surveillance.

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Fast forward to now.

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Back then in 1983, the hands of the iconic 'Doomsday Clock' were at 3 minutes to 'midnight', midnight being the fiery end of civilization.

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They have been at 2 mins to midnight since January 2018. They are unlikely to be moved further forward because time is metaphorically and literally, running out.

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The other day, a group of 100 retired Generals, secretaries and ministers of defense, secretaries and ministers of foreign affairs, and the odd retired prime minister, signed on to a declaration that said the world is closer to global thermonuclear war than it has been since 1962 (with the possible exception of Sept 26 1983 itself).

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A few days before that the Russian foreign minster Ivanov had said that (nuclear) war with NATO was/is a distinct possibility.

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There has been a steady trickle of warnings from former US and Russian commanders of nuclear forces (Generals Cartwright and Pavel Zolotarev), and retired secretaries of defense (William Perry). Mikhail Gorbachev and the Pope have warned of it.

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Nuclear war is emphatically NOT 'yesterdays' nightmare. It is a very current possibility. It is indeed the single most immediate threat to the continuance of so called 'civilization' and of humans as a species.

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The false missile alert in Hawaii not so long ago shows us just how ill-equipped conceptually we are to deal with a real nuclear threat. If the 4 minute warning arrives by tweet (as it did then) (assuming the innards of every phone and the network itself haven't yet been fried by EMP), then millenials will spend the 4 minutes that they haven't got not looking for a fallout shelter (anyway there are few left unless you are Swiss), but trying to determine if its a joke or if their neighbor has got the warning too.

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Then the 4 minutes will be over and they will be vaporized, or crushed under the rubble.

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If you'd like to see how a conventional war in Europe might go nuclear and escalate into a civilization-destroying apocalypse, just google 'Plan A'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jy3JU-ORpo>

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Its a simulation done at Princeton University by a group of nuclear weapons experts based on whats known of US and Russian current strategic planning and arsenals. Its 4 and a half minutes long.

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For a more detailed, in-depth view of one way the apocalypse could unfold, watch 'Inside the war Room' by the BBC, from 2014. It shows how conventional war in Estonia could lead via a 'WW-I style escalation sequence' to WW-III. Its a full hour, and now incongruously punctuated with ads.

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<https://vimeo.com/154370371>

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The world is trembling on the brink (indeed its been doing so for some years), as perilously or more perilously in spite of smaller arsenals than it ever was even in Colonel Stan's time. (Colonel Stan died in 2017. He'd be heartbroken to see how things have now developed.).

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Something can be done about it.

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Our Government could do more, much more, about it.

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They need to hear from us.

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Tell Sco Mo, Marise Payne, and Penny Wong how concerned you are . Scared shitless even.

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Write to them longhand on paper. Post or fax it.

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Demand we sign and ratify the Ban Treaty.

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Demand we get others to do so â starting with our 'great and powerful' ally.

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Demand we do more on nuclear risk reduction.

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Say you don't want a nuclear umbrella or extended deterrence.

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Make sure you copy it to your local member.

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Get active.

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Join ICAN or IPAN or MAPW or PND.

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Work to ensure that ten years down the track we are all still HERE, and that global warming hasn't been 'solved' by an abrupt nuclear winter in which we all get to freeze in the dark if we weren't vaporized in the first 45 minutes.

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Remember that global warming makes the planet uninhabitable in about 100-150 years.

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Nuclear weapons can do it in 45-90 minutes.

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Do something.

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John Hallam

UN Nuclear Disarmament Campaigner

People for Nuclear Disarmament

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