

Written by John Hallam
Tuesday, 25 September 2018 16:33 -

SEPT 26 2018

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

ON SEPTEMBER 26TH 1983, THE WORLD NEARLY ENDED. IT STILL COULD.

On Sept 26th, 1983, at the height of the cold war, the recently commissioned Soviet surveillance satellite system detected – or thought it had detected – a series of US missile launches.

On watch that night, at the Serpukhov-15 satellite ground station outside Moscow, was Colonel Stanislav Petrov, in a glass enclosure that overlooked a hall full of 200 others.

Ronald Reagan had just given his 'evil empire' speech. The Soviets had just shot down KAL-007 over Kamchatka, believing it to be a spy plane. Europe was just gearing up for the Able Archer exercise, which would be the second time in six weeks that the world would come close to a fiery end.

Suddenly, at half past midnight Moscow time, sirens blared at Serpukhov-15.

The computers indicated incoming missiles.

Colonel Stan was expected to pass on the alert to his superiors in Moscow, who would initiate an unstoppable computerized sequence that would launch somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 very large warheads at the US and its allies including Australia. Pine Gap outside Alice Springs would have been high on the target list, but in the US and Europe the rubble would have bounced as cities burned. As weeks later, the fires burned out, most humans would have perished in the initial strikes and counter-strikes, and the smoke, lofted high into the upper

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stratosphere, would be blotting out the sun. It would have been dark and cold, even in nations completely untouched by the holocaust.

It all didn't happen. Colonel Stan Petrov said he had a 'gut feeling' that there was 'a mistake somewhere'. He wasn't supposed to be on duty that night – he'd filled in for someone else, who, being junior to him, would have gone by the book – and we'd not be here to write about it.

Six weeks later, at the end of November, the Able Archer exercises very nearly caused WW-III all over again, with an overly realistic practice sequence for nuclear war that had the Soviet Union thinking it was not a game and seriously preparing for a first strike. (A 'pre-pre-emptive strike') Maybe Colonel Stan's too-recent brush with the apocalypse made them think twice.

A movie was later made about Colonel Stan, and he died not so long ago.

September 26th has appropriately become, via a resolution of the UN General Assembly, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, and a High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, involving heads of state and foreign ministers, will be held at the General Assembly in NY on that day. (26 Sept NY time)

<https://mailchi.mp/baselpeaceoffice/childrens-peace-prize-winner-selected-to-address-un-high-level-meeting-on-nuclear-disarmament?e=6ab4be4751>

But it could all still happen. The hands of the Doomsday Clock in 1983, stood at 3 mins to Midnight, midnight being the end of civilization. The hands of the Doomsday clock now stand at TWO minutes to midnight.

<https://thebulletin.org/sites/default/files/2018%20Doomsday%20Clock%20Statement.pdf>

This means that the room-fulls of nobel prizewinners who move the hands of the doomsday clock think that the chances of nuclear war that could end civilization right now, are WORSE

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than in 1983, a year in which the world nearly ended not just once, but twice, within a 6 week period.

The Doomsday Clock nobels are not alone in their alarm. They are joined by former US Defense Secretary Bill Perry, and by former commanders of both US and Russian strategic nuclear forces, as well as by Pope Francis.

There was one thing which was going on in 1983, which isn't taking place now however, in spite of the fact that now is MORE dangerous than 1983 – more dangerous that means, than at any time at least since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In 1983, people protested in their hundreds of thousands and even millions.

Sydney had a number of peace marches that numbered in the hundreds of thousands. I am old enough to remember. Washington had one that numbered a million.

The possibility of global annihilation was then the number one issue.

Why is it not the number one issue right now?

Moving the deck chairs, or playing musical ones, whether in Canberra or Washington is just not important compared with what we OUGHT to be giving our attention to. Surely the prospect of the end of civilization 'trumps' just about any other topic and any other priority you can think of. It did in 1983.

There is an urgent need for measures that would 'take the apocalypse off the agenda'. Adopting strategies of 'No First use' (NFU) and lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems so that Presidents and senior military do not have minutes and seconds to take decisions that might mean the end of the world are obvious ones.

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A full list of nuclear risk reduction measures is given here:

<http://www.abolition2000.org/en/nuclear-risk-reduction/>

Of course, nuclear weapons that do not exist cannot destroy or endanger the world. 122 Governments have put themselves on record to say they should be banned, and ICAN has the Nobel for its work. Here in Australia a bunch of dedicated, energetic (and fit) people cycled from Melbourne to Canberra (in a reprise of rides that took place in the late '70s and '80s), in the 'Nobel Peace Ride'. In the US, the largest state (California) has voted to urge its Federal Government to sign the Ban Treaty and to urgently take risk reduction measures, as have a number of local Governments.

But surely, the fact that civilization continues after over three decades to tremble on the brink of the abyss, is more important than who is Prime Minister (or President for that matter), more important than the abusive sex-lives of a former Australian deputy-PM (or a prospective US supreme court judge), and, simply, the most important issue there would possibly be.

Nuclear disarmament and risk reduction simply should be at the top of everyones agenda. That it is not imperils the survival of civilization and possibly of humans as a species.

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