

NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT 24-25MAR 2014

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

On 24-25March in the Hague, the leaders and diplomats of some 53 countries will meet to discuss how to make it less likely that downtown New York, London, Mumbai, Moscow, Kiev, Sydney, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Islamabad, Karachi, or Delhi (or anyplace else), will disappear in a bright flash with an instant body-count of somewhere between 200,000 and a million.

This will be the third 'Nuclear Security Summit' to have been held. The governments that take part, including both the US and Russia and other 'official' nuclear weapons states, will want to report modest progress in 'locking down' nuclear material, in theory at least making it less likely that terrorists will be able to accomplish a 'Nuclear 9-11'.

Modest progress at least, in making nuclear material less available for terrorist use does indeed seem to have taken place, with some 52 countries reporting unsecured nuclear material at the first such conference in 2010, and the number now expected to be less than 25 countries.

However, the success of an 82 year old nun in accessing the most secure nuclear facility in the United States (to make precisely this point) as well as an embarrassing series of other failures, does seem to suggest that not all is well in nuclear security in the US.

Much of the success in 'locking down' material that could be used in nuclear weapons in what used to be the USSR has come through the 'Nunn-Lugar' program, a joint program to boost nuclear security in Russia and the CIS with US assistance. While a good deal of progress has been made by this program, there is increasing resistance in the US Congress to its continued funding (exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis), and also in Russia.

And the most hazardous uses of nuclear weapons are left completely untouched by the emphasis on terrorist use in vaporizing the downtown of a single city.

Terrifying as the use of a Hiroshima-size nuclear weapon on a single city would be, and profoundly world-changing as those consequences would be, such use is not yet, literally, the 'end of the world'.

Other uses are.

The use of nuclear weapons by the validly constituted authorities of either the US and Russia, or India and Pakistan, most likely by miscalculation or malfunction, would, literally, spell the end of what we call the world.

An India-Pakistan nuclear exchange, still involving a modest 150-200 Hiroshima-sized or slightly bigger, fission warheads, largely targeted at Indian and Pakistani cities, would cause an immediate body – count of over 150 million, and a cloud of dense smoke from burning cities that could, in its aftermath, bring about cold dry conditions globally, in which crop failure could kill as many, according to some estimates, as a further 2 billion people over the ensuing decade's global famines.

A US-Russia nuclear exchange would utterly destroy the entire fabric of what we call 'civilization' in its first seconds. The smoke of burning cities worldwide, especially if the conflict also involved China, would create the coldest temperatures since the last ice – age and these would persist for at least 3 decades making human survival problematic.

The threats being made by some Russian (and US) commentators with respect to possible nuclear use over the Ukraine crisis, and the possibility that threat and counter-threat may spiral the crisis completely out of any rational control, are surely cause for deep concern.

As few as 5 large nuclear warheads (such as the warheads on the ends of China's DF-5 missiles), exploded in space above continental landmasses are enough to cause the global financial system, the internet, satellite communications, and all electronic communication of whatsoever type as well as all electrical equipment to cease functioning. (very large solar flare activity could also do this).

The Hague conferences focus on potential nuclear terrorism is undoubtedly of the highest importance, and if real progress has been made it is important to celebrate that, and to achieve further progress in locking down nuclear weapons usable materials.

However, the real potential of nuclear weapons to end civilization and possibly the human species remains untouched.

Back in 2008, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists published an article entitled 'minimizing the probability of Human Extinction' in which they pointed to the need to:

--take the 2000 or so nuclear warheads that are currently maintained by the US and Russia on 'Day-to-Day Alert', able to be launched in less than a minute, OFF that alert status

Written by John Hallam
Sunday, 23 March 2014 16:05 -

--Eliminate nuclear weapons altogether.

This, the Bulletin sagely noted, would remove completely the two most important short to medium term threats to human survival.

These steps have yet to be taken in spite of UN resolution after resolution that shows the overwhelming majority of the worlds governments in favor of doing them.

They need to be taken now. The Nuclear security Summit and the upcoming NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting at the UN in New York (28April-9May) are the appropriate forums in which to take these momentous decisions.

John
Hallam
61-2-9810-2598
61-2-9319-4296
johnhallam2001@yahoo.com.au

John Hallam is together with Prof Peter King, co-convenor of the Human Survival Project. Lobbying by him and others resulted in a resolution that has passed the UN General Assembly on alternate years since 2007, on lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems. He holds regular panels at the UN on accidental nuclear war.