



## **THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS THREAT HAS NOT GONE AWAY**

By David Krieger

Do you think the threat of nuclear weapons is a relic of the past? If so, think again.

The nuclear threat remains very real. At any moment of the day or night, a nuclear war could be triggered by accident or design. This isn't an exaggeration or a paranoid delusion. It's a fact.

Did you know that there are still 26,000 nuclear weapons in our world? Twelve thousand of these are deployed and ready to be used. Some 3,500 are on hair-trigger alert, which means that these weapons could be fired within moments of an order to do so.

No one would give that kind of order, right? Some say it is delusional to worry – after all, the Cold War is over. But what is delusional is to believe that we can maintain such arsenals for the indefinite future without a catastrophe – either a deliberate act of fanatical madness or Murphy's law playing out at a cataclysmic scale.

Imagine waking up and discovering one (or many or most) of the world's great cities – New York, Moscow, London, Paris, Beijing, Tokyo, New Delhi, Karachi, or Tel Aviv – lies in rubble and ashes. It could be your city.

We know this is possible. It's not a Hollywood thriller. It's an all too real possibility played out to the brink every day as new shifts of potential button-pushers and obedient followers take over the keys to Armageddon. Why aren't more of us taking steps to save our cities and our common future – steps to end this game of planetary Russian roulette?

Perhaps the reason we're not acting is that the nuclear threat seems too remote – an artifact of bygone days. After all, we have lived for over sixty years without the use of nuclear weapons in warfare. But the weapons have been there, and they have been poised at the brink and ready to launch – just not triggered to the blinding flash.

So we have become complacent – to our own detriment. Maybe we believe that we are just too smart to ever have a nuclear war – the fallacy in believing in *never* and in our own prowess. But there have been many accidents and many near misses with nuclear weapons. Just recently, six nuclear-tipped missiles were mistakenly loaded onto a US B-52 bomber and flown across the central US. Officials are still trying to figure out how that major breach in security could have happened – a mega-error that could have led to a mega-disaster. If such a breach can happen inside the US, with all our supposed controls and safeguards, it can happen anywhere.

The current instability in Pakistan could result in their nuclear weapons falling into the hands of fanatics or terrorists. As a human community on a planet we share, we cannot afford to run such risks. The era of nuclear weapons must be brought to an end – for our own good, for the good of humanity and for the sake of life on Earth.

By failing to be part of the solution, we are allowing our world to drift toward nuclear catastrophe. This is an even more urgent and “inconvenient truth” than that of climate change. We know full well that nuclear weapons are 100 percent human-created. While continued global warming could irrevocably change our planet, causing great dislocation and suffering, our self-created nuclear dangers are even more urgent. They could destroy civilization and end intelligent life on the planet.

Einstein concluded, “The splitting of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.”

The old way of thinking leaves important decisions to leaders who surely “know better,” relies upon brute force to solve conflicts, and believes that strong nations can solve their own problems. The new way of thinking that is needed to prevent nuclear catastrophe understands that ordinary citizens must lead their political representatives, relies upon dialogue and diplomacy to solve conflicts so all sides can “win,” and recognizes that even the most powerful nations cannot solve the great global problems confronting humanity without cooperation and collaboration.

The Nuclear Age we have created requires new modes of thinking based upon collective problem solving in which everyone has a seat at humanity’s table for one simple reason: our mutual survival depends upon it. There are many unknowns in our human future that we will have to deal with. One thing known for certain, though, is that nuclear weapons – monsters of our own making – can make our planet uninhabitable overnight. That is one looming threat we can choose to eliminate. For the sake of all that is dear to us – for the past as well as the future – that is a choice we must make.

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