

Can We Rest Assured That Just Because of the Unacceptably High Costs of Nuclear War and World War III, These Will Never Happen?

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In the middle of several very serious questions haunting humanity today the one which looms over all others is this terrible one—how high is the possibility of World War III/nuclear war and how destructive this will be?

Even those who take an optimistic view of the existing situation do not deny the obvious fact that weapons of mass destruction that exist with just the two biggest nuclear weapon powers (over 10,000 nuclear weapons plus other weapons) have the capacity to destroy most life on earth several times over.

They base their optimism mainly on their view that just because the risks of a large-scale nuclear war are so unacceptably high, this will never be allowed to actually happen by the world leadership and no matter how serious the hostilities become, some solution will always be found to avoid a war that has the capacity to destroy all sides.

Can this optimism be accepted? Is this optimism justified?

Is this optimism good for reducing worries and tensions of people, or is it likely to prove extremely harmful by creating a false assurance of safety and thereby avoiding much-needed safety steps? Do the actual risks remain unacceptably high?

What is at stake here is so huge—the very survival of life on planet—that even a low probability of an all-out nuclear war should be seen as extremely dangerous. If for example a 5% probability of this existed till about a few years ago, then this was a very serious matter and if this has now increased to about 10% then this is a much more serious matter. If this probability now appears to show a further increasing trend then this makes the

situation even more alarming.

On the whole we can say definitely that the probability of a life-destroying nuclear war today is unacceptably high and it shows all the signs of worsening further.

There are two aspects that need to be considered here, firstly the state of world leadership and governance and secondly certain technological factors.

It is extremely unfortunate that when international peace and cooperation are needed more than ever before to avoid the most catastrophic situations, the world leadership has been increasingly exposed in recent times for its glaring failures to achieve such peace and cooperation. In fact it is no exaggeration to say that at a time when the need for moving fast on the path of peace, disarmament and cooperation is the highest, world leadership has been instead moving in the reverse direction, as evident from increasing superpower rivalries and tensions as well as breakdown and non-renewal of important disarmament treaties or agreements.

In addition there are several serious environmental problems which together threaten to disrupt life-nurturing conditions of earth if not checked in time. To resolve these in time, apart from strong community actions, close international cooperation is also needed but this too is denied by increasing big power disputes and rivalries, as well as inability of the most of the rich countries to adopt a caring attitude towards the needs of poorer and most vulnerable countries. This is mentioned here as another example of the failure of world leadership to get its priorities right and resolve the most urgent problems before it is too late.

The most dangerous aspect of increasing irresponsibility shown by the leadership of big powers is their apparent willingness to pursue their rivalries and hostilities in ways that bring them closer to the possibilities of direct war (in addition to the several proxy wars they have fought and are fighting). Despite warnings by some of their most senior statesmen and diplomats, the USA and its close allies persisted with the relentless eastward expansion of NATO, thereby increasing tensions with Russia. This worsened with a coup in Ukraine assisted by them, followed by pushing Ukraine relentlessly towards increasing hostility with Russia. In the course of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, USA and close allies have increasingly taken decisions that can lead to direct confrontation of Russia with USA and its close allies/ NATO. New red lines have been drawn and crossed several times in the recent past.

The spread of dangerous ideas among elites and the absence of adequate training in commitment to peace makes them more susceptible to pursue irrational hostility rather than peace, and it is from these elites that the most decisive posts are filled and it is these elites that comprise the deep establishment.

Secondly, regarding the technological aspects, the extremely high speed at which nuclear weapons can be made to reach their targets makes it difficult to correct serious mistakes. It is possible in times of high tensions to mistake normal weapon delivery as nuclear weapon delivery and take retaliatory actions. There are possibilities of accidents and misunderstandings that can start a nuclear war.

There is huge irrationality and recklessness involved in perpetually living in a state of being just minutes away from doomsday.

The fact that world leadership sees nothing wrong in living this way year after year, endangering the life of billions of people and other life forms, is further evidence of its glaring failure to protect the most crucial interests of the planet and its life.

The previous two world wars were fought over several years and involved prolonged battles in many countries. World War 3 can take a very different shape as so much harm is caused within just a few days that it cannot continue beyond this. However it will be worse than the previous two world wars taken together as within a few days of nuclear warfare and the resulting nuclear winter most people and other life-forms will die or will be left to die. The actual use of just 10% of the existing stock of nuclear weapons will be enough to achieve such a hugely destructive result.

It is not just a question of whether the probability of this ever happening is 5% or 10%, more or less. The fact is that by any rational reckoning any probability of this happening even at minimum levels is unacceptable. This is a betrayal by world leadership of their most essential responsibility towards people, towards this generation and the next, towards completely innocent children, towards all forms of life.

Hence it is time for the people of the world to rise, led by women and youth, to create an entirely different world where the probability of such huge destruction by weapons and wars is zero, and where all people can live in peace and cooperate to resolve the most important environmental problems in time and ensure that all people can have creative, satisfactory livelihoods to meet their basic needs on a sustainable basis. In short, the world should be firmly on a path based on peace, safety, environment protection and justice.

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