

Nuclear Weapons Are the Biggest Single Danger for Humanity and All Forms of Life

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Hiroshima, August 6, 1945 : Father Kleinsorge, a German missionary, heard pathetic voices of people asking for water. When he managed to reach the place from where the voice had come, he saw nearly 20 persons, all of them in similar condition – their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their checks.



Temperature at the hypocentre of the explosion reaching the double of what it takes to melt iron, the face of a schoolgirl sitting almost a kilometre away from this hypocentre being burnt beyond recognition, skin sloughing off scalded bodies, badly injured starving people unable to swallow anything because of the stench of dead bodies - this was the devastation caused by a 12.5 Kiloton bomb in Hiroshima which killed and wounded as many people as a mass raid of 279 aircrafts, laden to capacity with bombs, striking at a city ten times as populous.

Nearly one hundred thousand people were killed within a few minutes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki after being hit by nuclear weapons in 1945, but if we count the longer-term deaths, those caused by internal bleeding, leukaemia, various other forms of cancer, then the death toll is likely to be as high as 3,50,000. In addition the next generation continued to pay for this cruelty in the form of children born with mental retardation, physical deformities and other serious health problems.

So cruel was the devastation that all of us must necessarily ask - we certainly do not want Hiroshima to happen to our friends, but do we want it to happen even to our worst enemies?

Despite this, the incredibly dangerous and cruel fact remains that humankind now possesses nuclear weapons which are many times more powerful than the ones used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and efforts are constantly on to increase the destructiveness of these weapons.

Some of the most eminent medical journals (including The Lancet, BMJ and JAMA) recently took an almost unprecedented initiative to together publish a joint editorial on August 1,

2023 asking for the elimination of nuclear weapons in view of their unacceptably high risks. What should be particularly welcomed is that they have taken the stand of elimination of nuclear weapons and not just of de-escalation or reduction, for as long as there are nuclear weapons there will be at least some possibility of their actual use as well.

This editorial has pointed out, on the basis of studies, that a large-scale nuclear war between the USA and Russia could kill 200 million people or more in the near term and potentially cause a global 'nuclear winter' that could kill 5 to 6 billion people, threatening the survival of humanity.

This editorial also stated that once a nuclear weapon is detonated, escalation to all-out nuclear war could occur rapidly. This is particularly important to consider at the present juncture when the risk of actual use of nuclear weapons has increased compared to any other period in the past three decades or so.

This risk has been frequently discussed and serious fears over it expressed by several eminent experts in the context of the ongoing Ukraine conflict. Here four nuclear weapon countries can be involved—Russia, USA, Britain and France. Of course USA nuclear weapons are also deployed in several other European countries as well and to that extent these also get involved but the weapons are under the control of the USA.

USA, France and UK are unlikely to knowingly start an attack on Russia and similarly Russia is unlikely to knowingly attack USA, France or UK because of the huge risks and likelihood of equally destructive retaliation. However the risk of tensions, suspicions and brinkmanship extended over a long time leading to start of unintentional nuclear war, based on misunderstanding of each other's intentions and some accidental event on top of it is possible. As pointed out earlier once this starts this can very quickly lead to a bigger exchange of nuclear weapons. The situation is not like the one in 1945 where there was to be no retaliation and it was well known by the aggressor also that there will be nothing beyond the use of two nuclear weapons as far as the attack on Japan was concerned. Now the present situation is a very different one as we do not know where it will stop when it starts. Also the speed which the nuclear weapon now travels towards its target also gives very little time to correct very costly mistakes.

The second possibility that has been discussed is whether Russia will at some stage use tactical or relatively smaller nuclear weapons against Ukraine. This is very unlikely today. Russia's security doctrine is that it will use nuclear weapons only if there is serious risk to its freedom, sovereignty and survival. Hence risks of nuclear weapon by Russia arises only if NATO escalates risks for Russia beyond a certain red line. However views can differ on how the red line is perceived or identified, and this is why the risk of nuclear war also remains present in this conflict zone.

In the middle of all the irrational Russophobia in the West and in particular among the ruling elites here, if the ultimate result of all the efforts to corner and surround Russia proves increasingly successful (which appears highly unlikely just now), the final impact will be only to compel Russia to exercise the nuclear weapon option. Then if this results in the USA or NATO also using nuclear weapons against Russia, and Russia retaliates, again we do not know where this will end. This brings out also the sheer absurdity, and of course the extreme danger, of the western/NATO strategy of encircling and bleeding as big a nuclear weapon power as Russia as much as possible, instead of using diplomacy to sort out all differences.

The second highest possibility of use of nuclear weapons will be when the USA shifts more of its aggression towards China at some point in future, as has been widely discussed. If the Korean region is to become a flashpoint of such a confrontation, then apart from China one more nuclear weapon power will be involved here in the form of N. Korea.

While this is for the future, the threat perception in just the Ukraine conflict by itself is so serious as to prompt warnings from several senior experts time and again. When the possibility of destruction likely to be caused is so huge, even a 5 to 10% increase in the possibility of use of nuclear weapons should be taken very seriously, and what has happened recently is a somewhat bigger increase in this possibility. As world leadership does not appear to be fulfilling the trust reposed in it for protecting us all from the worst possible destruction on earth, it is time for the people worldwide to come forward to make the peace and disarmament movement so strong that the leadership also comes under increasing pressure from people to move towards a path of a safer present and future. In the vision of the peace movement, one of the topmost priorities should be for the elimination of nuclear weapons as well as for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

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