

The Simple Act of “Pushing a Button”. Miscalculation, Mistake or Malice? The Unspoken Aftermath of a Nuclear War...

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“Since the appearance of visible life on Earth, 380 million years had to elapse in order for a butterfly to learn how to fly, 180 million years to create a rose with no other commitment than to be beautiful, and four geological eras in order for us human beings to be able to sing better than birds, and to be able to die from love.

It is not honorable for the human talent, in the golden age of science, to have conceived the way for such an ancient and colossal process to return to the nothingness from which it came through the simple act of pushing a button.”

I recently came across this quotation by the great Colombian novelist **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**, the author of [One Hundred Years of Solitude](#) and recipient of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature. The quotation is from a 1986 speech by Garcia Marquez entitled “*The Cataclysm of Damocles*.”

In the short quotation, he captures what needs to be said about nuclear weapons succinctly, poetically and beautifully. With a few deft literary brushstrokes, he shows that **the journey of life from nothingness to now could be ended with no more than “the simple act of pushing a button.”**

The button is a metaphor for setting in motion a nuclear war, which could happen by **miscalculation, mistake or malice**. Of course, it matters whose finger is on the button, but it matters even more that anyone’s finger is on the button.

There are not good fingers and bad fingers resting on the button. No one is stable enough, rational enough, sane enough, or wise enough to trust with deciding to push the nuclear button. It is madness to leave the door open to the possibility of “a return to nothingness.”

On one side of the ledger is everything natural and extraordinary about life with its long evolution bringing us to the present and poised to carry its processes forward into the future. On the other side of the ledger is “the button,” capable of bringing most life on the planet to a screeching halt. Also on this side of the ledger are those people who remain ignorant or apathetic to the nuclear dangers confronting humanity.

We all need to recognize what is at stake and choose a side.

Put simply, do you stand with life and the processes of nature that have brought such

beauty and diversity to our world, or do you stand with the destructive products of science that have brought us to the precipice of annihilation? We must each make a choice.

I fear too many of us are not awakened to the seriousness and risks of the unfolding situation. We are taken in by the techno-talk that amplifies the messages of national security linked to the button.

Nuclear deterrence is no more than a hypothesis about human psychology and behavior. It does not protect people from a nuclear attack. It is unproven and unprovable.

Nuclear deterrence may or may not work, but we know that it cannot provide physical protection against a nuclear attack. Those who believe in it, do so at their own peril and at our common peril.

The possibility of “a return to nothingness” is too great a risk to take. We must put down the nuclear-armed gun. We must dismantle the button and the potential annihilation it represents. We must listen to our hearts and end the nuclear insanity by ending the nuclear weapons era.

If we fail to act with engaged hearts, we will continue to stand at the precipice of annihilation – the precipice of a world without butterflies or beautiful roses, without birds or humans.

The golden age of science will come to an end as a triumph of cataclysmic devastation, which will be humanity’s most enduring failure.

Reading, discussing and understanding the meaning of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s short quotation should be required of every schoolchild, every citizen, and every leader of every country.

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