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Nuclear Dangers in Ukraine Crisis

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The letter below has been faxed today, 9 April 2014, by John Hallam (Australia) to President Putin (President Obama no longer has a fax), to the US and Russian Geneva and NY UN missions, to Kerry at various numbers, to Lavrov at various numbers, and to the House Strategic Forces subcommittee.

Dear Presidents Putin and Obama, Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov:

The undersigned people and groups wish to draw your attention, if your own advisers have not already done so, to the grave dangers of escalation and miscalculation that could flow from the rapidly-developing crisis over Crimea and the Ukraine.

The very fact that you find yourselves in this situation underscores a fatal flaw in the theory of nuclear deterrence and the danger of relying upon it. Deterrence is mistakenly extolled for instilling caution in international affairs; moderation and predictability, not brinkmanship, are supposed to be everyone's watchword. And yet escalatory actions have followed one upon another – a pattern witnessed in other crises as well. Given this apparently uncontrollable urge to one-upmanship and the world-threatening nature of nuclear war, it is the height of recklessness that the escalatory ladder is topped off by nuclear war.

Having the threat of nuclear war feature in any way in this crisis only worsens it. Each and every nuclear armed party involved in this crisis should state unequivocally that the 'nuclear option' is absolutely ruled OUT. Rather, all parties should emphasise the many points of mutual benefit that favour the pursuit of de-escalation and conflict resolution.

To give the preceding concrete meaning and to safeguard civilisation and much else, immediate steps should be taken to de-alert the nuclear arsenals. It is in times of crisis that accidents and unauthorised action become the most likely. During the Cuban Missile crisis there were several incidences that brought the world even closer to the brink of nuclear war than either Khrushchev or Kennedy wanted or realised at the time. The same was true of the crisis in Europe over the deployment of medium range missiles.

Your two countries together possess about 95% of the world's nuclear warheads. Each of you maintain just under 1000 warheads each at a state of readiness in which they can be launched, according to Russian military sources, in 'a few dozens of seconds'. Those warheads are meant to be aimed primarily at each other, and yet their use would spell the end of civilisation. This subject was discussed at length in the Nayarit, Mexico, conference of 13-14 February which your two governments refused to attend, though 146 other governments did so. After an immediate body count of over a billion, subsequent global climatic effects could make human survival questionable, with ice age conditions lasting as long as 30 years, according to the presentations made at Nayarit by Professor Alan Robock and to the U.S. Congress in Washington by Dr. Ira Helfand.

Your nuclear arsenals continue to impose profound existential insecurity upon the world as a whole. That nuclear weapons give you a perceived but unrealistic sense of security vis a vis one another must not blind you to the utter recklessness of holding so much at risk – most of which is not even 'yours'! You have no right to do that.

Looking beyond this crisis, a policy of ruling out ANY use of nuclear weapons should be universally adopted.

Having been de-alerted, your arsenals should remain de-alerted until they are disarmed.

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In short, we urge you to find in this crisis an opportunity to prepare for living in a nuclear weapon free world, by dealing with it strictly in non-nuclear terms. We will all be much more secure when such a world has been established, and human survival has thus been secured.

Thank you.

Signed:

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