

Report from the Abolition 2000 Working Group on Step1: De-Alerting

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'Step 1' in any 'step by step' (or 'building block') process to eliminate nuclear weapons has to be reducing the immediate risk of nuclear-weapons use by accident, miscalculation or intent. The most important measure in this regard is to take all nuclear weapons off high alert status. This is a measure that not only makes the world safer by orders of magnitude, but which dramatically reduces the utility of nuclear weapons as a tool to bargain or threaten with and reduces their salience in security policies.

Other important measures include adopting no-first-use (NFU) policies, reducing nuclear threat postures and reinforcing common security and diplomatic approaches to current conflicts between nuclear-armed States to prevent them getting out-of-hand.

The reduction of nuclear risk has become – terrifyingly – an issue that is dramatically more relevant now than it has been perhaps since the Cuban missile crisis.

The movement of the hands of the Doomsday Clock from 3 mins to midnight to 2 and a half minutes to midnight is in part a recognition that the risk of accidental nuclear war- nuclear war by madness, miscalculation and above all by malfunction – is increasing. One recently new risk is the possibility for cyber-attacks on nuclear command, control and communication systems. With nuclear weapons on launch-on-warning policies and high operational readiness to use (high alert), such an attack on a nuclear command and control system could lead to an unauthorized or inadvertent nuclear weapons launch. De-alerting would do much both to genuinely decrease the risk of an accidental apocalypse, and to defuse the very tensions that feed that risk.

The issue of alert status fits into the somewhat broader category of 'reducing nuclear (war) risks'.

Accordingly, rather than campaigning on de-alerting by itself and in isolation, I have fitted it into letters and memos on the reduction of nuclear risk.

Reducing the risk of nuclear war – of an 'accidental apocalypse' – is in my view, an existential priority, and not merely one step on a supposedly 'obsolete' step by step program. Unless the risk of nuclear war is radically decreased we will at some stage, sooner or later, have nuclear war in which civilization will destroy itself and take most living species with it. De-alerting (together with other measures such as NFU), changes the odds of that taking place by orders of magnitude. Risk reduction **has** to be a vital item on any abolitionist program – indeed it has to be on the program of anyone (abolitionist or otherwise) who simply thinks that an event sequence that not only destroys human civilization but most other species also is something we would rather not have.

In spite of numerous warnings from the very highest and most distinguished quarters even within the abolitionist movement, reducing the risk of nuclear war – with de-alerting as its centrepiece – does not receive nearly the attention it should.

In this contest I do wish to salute the efforts made over the last couple of years however, by both Global Zero, and also by the Union of Concerned Scientists. I wish fervently that more notice could have been taken of their arguments for de-alerting by bodies such as the US Congress.

I want also to very much welcome the efforts made by PNND, especially recently in the Inter

Parliamentary Union and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, both of which have moved the parliaments of nuclear-armed States to support de-alerting, no-first-use and other nuclear risk-reduction measures. Civil society should join forces with these bodies, through PNND, to amplify the voice of sanity.

Going back over the PND and Human Survival Project website, there are a number of letters, memos and memos cum press-releases, all of them directed to policymakers, parliamentarians, decision-makers and 'wonks'.

Those addressing nuclear risk include:

--20 Jan 2017 – Press-release – US-Russia should take the apocalypse off the agenda

--10 December 2016 – On The Brink – Generals, Organizations, urge measures to decrease the likelihood of a nuclear apocalypse (letter signed by amongst others Generals Pavel Zolotarev and Jehangir Karamat, urging risk reduction measures including NFU and De-alerting)

--5 Nov 2016 Press release – Rising danger of Nuclear War

--15 Sept – memo to Open Ended Working Group, includes prominent reference to risk reduction measures

--4 Aug 2016 – De-Alerting Letter faxed to US Government, Congressional select committees on strategic nuclear forces

--Jan 2016 – Press release – 3 Minutes to Midnight

--Dec 2015 – Press- release – Governments urged to support UN disarmament measures.