

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Within the realm of possibility

Thousands of people have been killed since the Russian Army invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, and many cities have been bombed into rubble.

As tragic as that is, it pales in comparison of the worldwide calamity that nuclear war would bring.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

There are more than 13,000 nuclear warheads, most of them deployed by Russia and the United States.

Today's warheads are far more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nuclear missiles now have multiple warheads, making them almost impossible to defend against.

Millions of people could be killed instantly from a nuclear blast and incendiary fireball. Others would be killed from radiative fallout that can drift for hundreds of miles.

In addition, nuclear explosions give out electromagnetic pulses that cripple tiny circuits inside today's electronics, which would knock out power grids, phone and internet lines, and other electronic infrastructure on which modern life depends.

Given the vast number of warheads, each controlled by fallible human beings, it is amazing there has not been an accidental launch of a nuclear missile over the last 70 years they've been deployed.

In fact, there have been numerous times that nuclear weapons were almost launched by accident. Here

are just two:

During the height of the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis, when the United States discovered Russia had placed nuclear missiles in Cuba, the U.S. Navy blockaded the island.

A Russian submarine nearby dove deep underwater hoping to avoid detection by U.S. warships. The submarine crew was unable to communicate with Moscow, and when a Navy destroyer began dropping some practice depth charges to signal the submarine to surface — a really stupid thing to do — the Russians concluded World War III had commenced.

The submarine captain wanted to launch a nuclear-tipped torpedo against the U.S. fleet, but another officer talked him out of it. The submarine surfaced and discovered there was no war.

In September 1983, Soviet nuclear early warning radar showed the launch of an American intercontinental ballistic missile with four more missiles behind it coming from a base in the United States.

The commanding officer at the Soviet control room decided to wait for more evidence before relaying the warning to his superiors. None came.

The decision to wait likely prevented a retaliatory attack by the Soviets that would have started a full-scale nuclear war.

The Soviet radar had mistaken an unusual weather event for missiles.

Imagine if something like that happened today, with a paranoid Vladimir Putin putting Russian nuclear forces on "special combat readiness."

We like to think the Russo-Ukrainian war is a European problem, but it could involve us in a heartbeat.



INTER-CONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE is paraded through Red Square during Russia's annual Victory Day Parade to celebrate the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in May 1945. "The prospect of nuclear war is now within the realm of possibility," warned Antonio Guterres, the United Nations secretary general, last week.