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The [Helen Caldicott Foundation](#) Presents

Dr. Helen Caldicott

Opening Remarks

[Symposium: The Dynamics of Possible Nuclear Extinction](#)

The New York Academy of Medicine, 28 February - 1 March 2015

I set up this conference, basically, because I read an article in [The Atlantic Monthly](#) some months ago quoting Stephen Hawking—and we were hoping that he'd give a few opening remarks but he's been very ill lately—and Max Tegmark who is one of our speakers this morning.

They were talking about artificial intelligence and it's moving very, very fast at the moment. Elon Musk talks about that too. And they're very worried about it. Yet they can't seem to stop themselves keeping going. It said that within about 10 or 20 years, but maybe shorter, computers will be autonomous, that they may be able to reproduce themselves. That you can't—I'm saying this—program morality or conscience into a computer. And that they're worried that computers themselves could initiate a nuclear war.

When I read that I thought, My God, as if things aren't bad enough with the [United States and Russia militarily confronting](#) each other now [for the first time since the Cold War](#). Computers could take over our world in that way.

So that's why I set the conference up. I will just read to you how I think, and I see the planet as a patient because I'm a physician and clearly the planet is in Intensive Care Unit now, acutely, critically ill. Whether or not the planet will survive is really difficult to ascertain but the prognosis looks poor.

As a physician I'm trained to assess a patient by taking a detailed medical history, then conducting a careful physical examination, which is what we will do today in the nuclear

weapons area.

This is followed by a series of laboratory tests which guide me to a diagnosis. Appropriate treatment then follows after the illness has [been] diagnosed and the cause is defined. That's what we'll be assessing today and trying to analyze.

It is also imperative that the main disease is attended to and not concentrate on peripheral issues such as treating an unrelated complaint. Like treating a boil on a patient's nose when the patient is dying of metastatic carcinoma. Which is really significant now and appropriate to what's happening in the world today.

Therefore I look at the world and its on-going pathology from a similar perspective. There are many serious issues facing the world at the moment. But it is necessary to triage the most pertinent threats to our very survival as it's easy to be diverted by lesser threats. Manic denial, fashions, gourmet foods, and the like—you can see this happening in New York all the time.

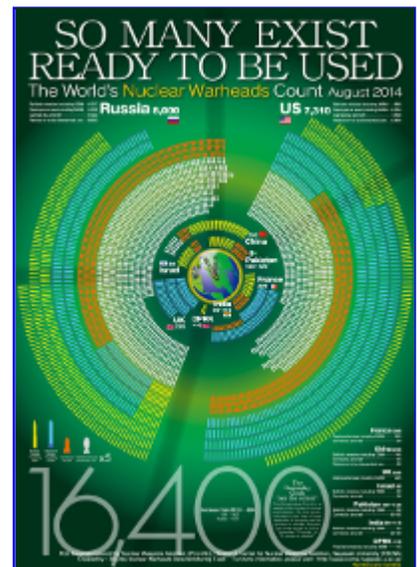
As a physician I would therefore say that the ever-present threat of nuclear war is an on-going existential risk which threatens the extinction of almost all planetary life. This threat is even more acute because most people and politicians have become immune or are unaware of this threat or alternatively are practicing psychic numbing. That would apply at the moment to the *New York Times* let me say. There's a reporter here, take note.

The truth is that Russia and America possess 94 percent of the 16,400 nuclear weapons in the world. The US maintains its first-strike winable nuclear war policy and both countries have raised their nuclear arsenals to a [higher state of alert because of the trouble in the Ukraine](#).

That I've read about Putin and if Putin has raised his weapons to a higher than normal state of alert so has [STRATCOM](#). And STRATCOM raised the weapons to its highest state of alert during 9/11 because no one knew what was happening. Human fallibility, mistakes.

These are the issues to be discussed:

- [One:] What are the factors, human and technological, that could precipitate a nuclear war between Russia and America and how many times have we come close to nuclear war and how much longer will our luck hold?
- Two: What are the ongoing technological and financial developments taking place which are relevant to the nuclear weapons arsenals of both the US and Russia?
- Three: What problems are associated with lateral proliferation of nuclear weapons via strenuous corporate marketing of nuclear technology?
- Four: What are the medical and environmental consequences of either a small or large



nuclear war?

- Five: What are the underlying dynamics that have brought life on earth to the brink of extinction?
- Six: How can we assess this situation from an anthropological perspective?
- Seven: What is the pathology within the present political situation that could lead us to extinction?
- Eight: How can this nuclear pathology be cured?

I would venture to say that this is probably the most important conference taking place in the United States today but as Janne Nolan said, she thinks in the world today.

When the Cold War ended America agreed with Russia that she would not enlarge NATO to threaten Russia. However there's a man called [Norman Augustine](#) who was the head of Lockheed-Martin. When the Cold War ended the military corporations were a bit desperate because they had no one to sell their weapons to. There was no *raison d'être* to build their weapons anymore.

Norman Augustine decided to visit the NATO countries and he was supported by many, many people. I have [an article here](#) talking about all the corporations who are behind him. He visited the small little countries—Lithuania, Latvia, etc.—and persuaded them to join NATO.

To join NATO you must militarily arm yourself to the tune of several billion dollars which was always good for Lockheed-Martin *et al.* They were successful. Of course they said you can become a democracy which is absolute rubbish. Look at this country, which claims it's a democracy. In fact this country is a socialized country where I think over 60 percent of the discretionary tax dollar goes to the military industrial complex and the Pentagon. That's socialism. The nuclear power industry is socialized too.

The main way that America spends its money is on socialism and all the little people have to put up with capitalism and fend for themselves. It's a very interesting dichotomy.

These countries were persuaded to join NATO and militarily arm. Poor little countries. And also the EU and the IMF persuade them to tighten their belts and you saw what happened in Greece when you tighten your belt.

What's happened is NATO has enlarged right up to the border of Russia. You can imagine how America would feel if suddenly Russia decided and announced with Canadian acceptance that Canada was now part of the Russian block.

We saw it happen when the Russians dared to put some nuclear missiles in Cuba and we were brought to the brink of extinction at that time. I knew Robert McNamara who was in the Oval Office. He said to me, "Helen, you don't know how close we came"—to within minutes.

We have come within minutes of nuclear annihilation quite a number of times and that will be

documented by our speakers today and tomorrow.

Then we've got the Ukrainian situation which was orchestrated by the United States. There was a coup, Yanukovych fled and Poroshenko was put in who is an American puppet. What's new? A lot of the people who are fighting on the Ukrainian side are ex-NAZIs or, in fact, NAZIs.

So Russia and America are confronting each other militarily for the first time since the Cold War ended. *Nothing* could be more dangerous.

What I find astonishing is that the *New York Times* is fostering the myth that it's all Putin's fault. The Crimea has been part of Russia since Catherine The Great. It's their only warm water port. They had a referendum and the Crimeans wanted to stay with Russia.

So the situation is grim. It reminds me of the very primitive arguments during the Cold War when I first came to America. Well I'd been there before but in 1978 almost everyone said It's better to be dead than red. And I said, What? And they said, We don't want to be Communists. I said, What about the Pygmies in Africa? They don't worry about that. And they said, They don't want to be Communists, too. And I thought, this is a psychotic country. And indeed it was.

So I organized with others, Physicians for Social Responsibility and we held conferences throughout America describing the medical consequences of nuclear war. The first such symposium was held at Harvard and the reporters there were absolutely perplexed. They said, What are doctors talking about nuclear war for? This is a *political* issue. And we said, No, it's not. It's a *medical* issue because nuclear war will create the final epidemic of the human race.

Then the Bishop, or Archbishop of Boston—Cardinal whoever—would wake up the next morning and there would be a map of Boston with the concentric circles of vaporization, and third degree burns, and fires, etc., and he'd say, I don't think Jesus would approve of this.

It happened all over the country so finally the Catholic Bishops got together and wrote a Pastoral Letter against nuclear war. Then the Methodist Bishops got together and they did a similar thing and their Pastoral Letter was even better than the Catholic Bishops.

Eventually we had a million people in Central Park in 1982 in June, the biggest rally ever in the history of America. Black lesbians from Harlem, Southern Baptists, Mormons, everyone. It was just amazing.

We had 80 percent of people supporting the notion that nuclear weapons must be eradicated, really. Gorbachev then had the support of the world with Reagan. They met in Reykjavík, these two men, and over a weekend they almost agreed to abolish nuclear weapons. So therefore there is a precedent to abolish nuclear weapons and it's time that happened.

The country that's holding up the abolition of nuclear weapons is America. Without America moving, Russia won't move. If America moves, unilaterally, Russia will too. We know that. Because they can't afford these weapons and they're very aware of what happens in war because they lost 30 million people on the Russian front in the Second World War and that's deeply

embedded in their souls.

I can remember as a little girl standing in the kitchen. My mother said, Thank God, he's turned on Russia. He'll never beat Russia. But they suffered terribly. And they'll never forget it.

So we're in a very, very invidious position now. I've read that Putin's got his weapons on the highest state of alert as I already have said. And I'm really worried about the US Senate now run by hawks—John McCain's never seen a war he didn't want to get into.

Why do men kill? I'll go back and end with Einstein who said, "The splitting of the atom changed everything, save man's mode of thinking; thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe." Nothing could be clearer now.

I'll end by saying the Ukraine contains Chernobyl. There are many thousands of people dying with cancer now and other diseases related to Chernobyl. The Ukraine has 15 large reactors like Chernobyl. You can't have any sort of war in a country with reactors because it'll turn into a nuclear war. It's easy to melt down a reactor with [inaudible]; very easy.

So we're in a very, very tenuous position in the nuclear age.

So I welcome you all here today. We've got an outstanding faculty of speakers who will address many issues that I have referred to and many others. It's really quite exciting. And this is being live-streamed, as I've said, all over the world.