

# Spiegel Online warns of nuclear war

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On Sunday evening, after the Munich Security Conference, *Spiegel Online* published an article titled “NATO-Russia crisis: The Nuclear spectre returns”. It confirms the warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site* regarding the danger of nuclear war between the superpowers, which is steadily rising as the Ukraine crisis and the imperialist states’ aggression against Russia intensify.

The article begins by describing a little-known incident on January 25, 1995, which almost triggered nuclear war between the United States and Russia. At that time, Norwegian and American researchers fired a rocket from the Norwegian island of Andøya, which caused the Russian armed forces to go to the highest alert level, and prompted Russian president Boris Yeltsin to activate the keys to the nuclear weapons.

The rocket, used by the scientists to study the Northern Lights, travelled on the same trajectory that US intercontinental nuclear missiles would take on their way to Moscow. Moreover, on the Russian radar, the four-stage research rocket looked like a Trident missile fired by an American submarine. Then everything happened extremely quickly. The alarm sirens sounded in a Russian radar centre, then technicians reached for the phone and reported a US missile attack. Yeltsin called up generals and military advisers on the telephone, but finally gave the all-clear because no second missile followed.

*Spiegel Online* notes that Yeltsin at that time probably left the Russian nuclear missiles in their silos “because relations between Russia and the United States in 1995 were relatively trusting”. Today, however, the situation is entirely different. The magazine quotes senior politicians, military experts and scholars, who provide a picture of how dangerous the situation currently is.

“A five or six minute decision time can be enough if trust exists, when the communication channels exist

and you can activate them quickly,” former Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov said during the Munich Security Conference, which was dominated by the imperialist powers’ escalation against Russia. “Unfortunately, this machinery is currently running very badly,” Ivanov added.

Asked what would happen today if the 1995 incident were repeated, he said: “I’m not sure if the right decisions would still be taken.”

Ivanov recently published an analysis with former British defence minister and head of the European Leadership Network (ELN) Des Browne and former US senator Sam Nunn, warning that “the institutions created for constructive interaction between Russia and the West have been badly damaged and are not in a position to deal with the current political, economic and security issues.”

The authors write that “for years, there has been no close personal relationships between leaders and no clear and timely communication necessary for crisis management”. The NATO-Russia Council was dissolved, and other agreements that serve to foster mutual trust, such as the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the Washington Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Systems (INF), had already been suspended or placed in question.

Back in November, the London-based ELN think tank published an alarming report on the growing threat of war in Europe. Since the NATO-supported right-wing coup in Kiev in February 2014, there had been almost 40 “near misses” between the Russian military and the NATO forces sent into eastern Europe that could have caused a military conflict.

Nunn described to *Spiegel Online* a gloomy picture of the situation: “Trust between NATO and Russia is almost destroyed. In the midst of Europe, a war is taking place, international treaties have collapsed or are heavily overloaded, we have tactical nuclear weapons

everywhere in Europe. The situation is extremely dangerous.”

Ivanov compares the situation today with the Cold War. At that time, there were many security mechanisms, “a huge amount of agreements and documents which ensured that there was no military confrontation between the Soviet Union and NATO.” Today, “the danger of war [is] bigger”.

One measure of the nuclear threat is the “Doomsday Clock” of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* ( *BAS*). On January 19, the *BAS*, which has existed since 1945, set the clock to “three minutes before midnight”. The last and the only time it had stood there was in 1984, when the United States stepped up the nuclear arms race against the Soviet Union, and as a result, “cut or limited all communication channels”.

The *BAS* justified its current decision as follows. The “political leaders” had failed “to protect citizens from possible disaster” and thus “endangered every person on earth.” In 2014, the nuclear powers had “taken the crazy and dangerous decision to modernise their nuclear arsenals”. They had abandoned “reasonable efforts to disarm” and allowed the “economic conflict between Ukraine and Russia to develop into an East-West confrontation”.

Significantly, neither the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* nor *Spiegel Online* names those responsible for the growing threat of nuclear war. It was the imperialist powers who first organised a coup in Ukraine utilising fascist forces, and who since then drove forward the aggression against Russia and now prepare to supply arms to the pro-Western regime in Kiev.

The scientists’ and journalists’ silence is not surprising. While the *BAS* promotes illusions in the phony promises of the Obama administration to create a nuclear weapons-free world, *Der Spiegel* has followed the broader line of the German media, which has launched the most aggressive warmongering over the last year against Russia.

Now, it is dawning on some people in the newsroom how dangerous the situation that they helped conjure up really is. For example, *Spiegel Online* notes that tactical nuclear weapons are also stored in Germany at the Büchel airbase in the Eifel, “which are currently being modernised at a high cost”. Although they are under US command, “in wartime” they could be “dropped by

German Tornado fighter jets.”



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