

Unintended Nuclear War – Risk and Consequences

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Link to this document: www.fwes.info/akav-risk-cons-kf-21-1-en.pdf

More detailed version (4 pages): www.fwes.info/akav-risk-cons-21-1-en.pdf

See also www.unintended-nuclear-war.eu

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The risk of accidental nuclear war comes from early warning systems that serve to predict attacks with nuclear missiles. Errors in such systems could show a supposed attack (false alarm) and trigger a counter-reaction in a crisis situation, leading to accidental nuclear war. A new arms race (hypersonic weapons, space weapons, drones), increasing cyber warfare capabilities and automated decision-making (artificial intelligence) could increase the risk of accidental nuclear war. All these aspects may interact with or directly affect early warning systems. Errors in early warning systems can be particularly dangerous in crisis situations. Such crisis situations could increase in the future because of climate change.

If there is an accidental nuclear war in the future, the effects will not be comparable to those of Hiroshima, but will be considerably more serious. In 1945, only the USA had nuclear weapons and did not need to fear a corresponding backlash. There was no danger that the use of one nuclear weapon would lead to an escalation spiral with the use of many nuclear weapons. If an early warning system reports an attack with many nuclear missiles, which has already happened several times in the past, then a counter-reaction only makes sense if many nuclear missiles are used. Within a few minutes, processes can take place in early warning systems that lead to the use of many nuclear weapons, which can hardly be stopped.

A probability of occurrence of a nuclear war by accident cannot be determined. If the next 30 years are considered as the time period, the risk can be high that such an "accident" will occur at some point during this period, i.e. the probability of occurrence is not negligible. The consequences of a nuclear war by accident can be very serious, since in such a case the use of many nuclear weapons must be expected and thus a nuclear winter can also be triggered. As a result, food production can come to a standstill, threatening the survival of all humanity. Even if the survival of all humanity is threatened in the event of a major nuclear weapon deployment, only a very small proportion of people will be dead immediately. The others will die in the days, weeks or months afterwards, as a result of radiation, or they will freeze to death or starve to death as a result of the nuclear winter. There will be fierce battles for the basic necessities. Only the strongest and most brutal will be able to prevail, at least for a time. Knowledge and awareness of the risks and consequences of accidental nuclear war are lacking among the population.