



WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Rupert Godesen imagines the unimaginable as he explains what will happen in the event of a nuclear attack

It's December 25th and I'm unwrapping a Christmas present from my Mum. It's book-shaped, so I take a deep breath and prepare my face to try not to look too disappointed, for what was inevitably going to be a ghost-written book by some science-fiction guy. No doubt their book is designed to tell me where my life has been going wrong until now, because,

hallelujah now I have the answer to all my problems in my hands...

And there it was, inward groan – outward glow of gratitude. Of course, I couldn't let on that I don't really enjoy reading these kinds of things, but later that day and after the inevitable festive argument, I found a quiet corner and decided I'd show willing and opened it up. I have to admit that I was already

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mentally strolling to the nearest charity shop, the day after Boxing day to get rid of it, but I was genuinely surprised and ended up ploughing through it and reading it from cover to cover in one sitting. Turns out he (or at least his ghost writer – credit where it's due) had some good ideas that really resonated with me.

So the very next day, my girlfriend and I decided to follow the author's expert advice and we gave our TV away, deleted all of those relentlessly buzzing news apps from our smartphones (because, to be honest, reading all that news online and then watching it on the television just depresses the hell out of me these days) and we instead now get a newspaper every couple of days, read it from cover to cover, listen to Radio 4 and podcasts and we're both happier and have a bit more bandwidth for life in general.

Among the things that I found most depressing and genuinely terrifying, was just how close we seem to be inching (or sleepwalking as some commentators like to call it) towards the detonation of a nuclear weapon. An idea almost unimaginable to any rational human being – surely if one were used, so many red lines would be crossed that the response would be truly catastrophic to everything we know and love.

THE UKRAINE EFFECT

Putin's war against Ukraine will come to an end one day, one way or another, and when it is over and done with who can guess at the vast human and financial cost to the whole world of Russia's special military mission and the cost to the world in the years to come already that no one can yet calculate. Young Russians have fled the country in their tens of thousands, young men and women who wanted to avoid call up (and they almost certainly won't be going back) and Putin is feeding those that remain into the Bakmut meat grinder. When the war is over who will start businesses, have children, look after the aged and work in the factories?

A few years ago I attended the Counter CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) Instructors course. A two-week programme specifically designed to help me prepare my soldiers, to survive and to fight on the battlefield, in the event that the enemy and our side are using all our truly nasty weapons on one another. We spent one afternoon talking about nuclear weapons and their effects. The course wasn't long after the Skripals had been poisoned in picturesque Salisbury and we had a presentation from a couple of soldiers that had attended the scene, which made for a chilling few hours.

At that time, it seemed truly shocking that Russia could send agents to this country and to Salisbury of all places with that kind of weapon, and not even bat an eyelid, instead laugh at our outrage – our own naivety seems laughable now. And now just over a year after Putin's invasion of Ukraine with missiles slicing through apartment buildings and power stations being destroyed, thousands of children orphaned or seized by the Russians and sent East for re-education it truly chills the blood, what will he do next? Would they make a similar calculation when it came to the red button? If Putin was backed into a corner where he felt he had no choice? It feels to me like a global game of chicken and one in which there will be few winners.

I recently listened to a podcast by the team at the Telegraph called *Ukraine The Latest*, an anniversary

edition to mark a full year since the invasion. The presenters talked about how slow the West had been to respond after Russia's aggression. During the podcast the first mention of the "Nuclear option" was when the Western powers had discussed the option of removing Russia from the SWIFT banking scheme and cutting off its access to the money markets. Surely the Western powers must have known that Putin had been building up a huge war chest to weather the inevitable sanctions.

As I type these words, President Putin's latest move on the chessboard has been to suspend Russia's participation in the New Start Nuclear Arms treaty.

AT THE FIRST SIGNAL OF AN ATTACK, IT'S VITAL TO GET UNDERCOVER AS SOON AS YOU CAN

Starved of any successes to present to the Russian people in his state of the union address, he railed against the West and a shudder went down a million backs. When I was a boy I remember clearly my parents' fear of nuclear war, it was like a strange fog that seemed to permeate everything.

And now that fear is back. In the summer of 2022, I received an enquiry from a client, who I was about to run a course for, and they asked me to include a session on actions in the event of a nuclear strike. Since then every enquiry has asked me to include a discussion and actions on a nuclear strike.

When people think about a nuclear attack, they conjure images of "strategic" nuclear attacks such as those inflicted on the Japanese Empire to end WW2 in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Things have moved on from those all-or-nothing days, and the sort of weapons Putin is brandishing are 'tactical' nuclear weapons, smaller and designed to take out a squadron of tanks for example, a town, a battalion grouping in an assembly area in the rear rather than a whole city. They can be thought of in terms of a tactical move on the battlefield, as opposed to comprising a whole strategy.

A 'strategic' strike on a city would most likely be the end of everything, the retaliation would be unimaginable. However, a tactical strike would be relatively less catastrophic for the person caught in the middle of it. So let's imagine you're in a town that's subjected to a tactical nuclear attack.

Firstly, there would not be the iconic mushroom cloud punching a hole in the clouds and scooping everything up and chucking it into the atmosphere, the explosion would be much, much smaller than Hiroshima or Nagasaki – thankfully. The danger (initially) to those caught in the area would be from the blast and also from flying debris – think of a small hand grenade thrown by a soldier, wrapped in tightly bound steel wire, designed to kill and maim soldiers in trenches – everything in the area, hit by a tactical nuke will be turned into shrapnel, from masonry to bicycles, car mirrors to push chairs will be hurled outwards from the point of detonation to strike squashed human bodies and to pierce, puncture and wreck our relatively vulnerable bodies.

THERE WON'T BE A MUSHROOM CLOUD SCOOPING EVERYTHING UP INTO THE ATMOSPHERE

So at the first signal of an attack, get undercover as soon as you can, preferably into a basement which will protect you both from the blast itself and then from the fallout that will follow. The second thing to do is to get underground or inside (under cover) as soon as you can, because although there will be no city-killing mushroom cloud there will be a significant danger from fallout and irradiated particles falling to the ground. These can be easily inhaled and ingested. Wherever you find yourself, try and block all the gaps in the windows, doors, cracks – anything that will let in free-flowing fresh air – because along with this free-flowing air will be irradiated particles, which will be inhaled and ingested into our bodies and will create havoc. I remember a medic friend of mine

who once compared pathogens, bacteria and viruses to youngsters getting into your body (house), having really noisy rowdy parties, getting off their heads and smashing the place up. Irradiated air particles would be the very worst party guests, so you'll need to use anything to hand to prevent any free-flowing air from entering your area of sanctuary.

RULE OF THREES

A human being can last roughly three minutes without oxygen, three days without water and three weeks without food so luckily you'll only have to hold out in your sanctuary for three days and after that it will be relatively safe to emerge into the daylight.

After three days with any luck the emergency services will have gained access to the area and the radioactive particles will have either been dealt with or dissipated by the wind and rain. I don't know about you, but I have been keeping everything crossed that our elected statesmen and women can find an alternative way out of this and that this horrific turn of events doesn't become a reality. But with Putin in charge, who knows... ●

Rupert Godesen is the founder of HASP Training Ltd. An experienced travel safety and security instructor, founder of HASP Training Ltd, a Hostile Environment Training (HEAT) company based in London. Rupert has delivered HEAT to numerous global corporate businesses, international aid organisations and media teams.

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