We Are Now Morally Required to *Finally* Act

by David Borris, CAPA Board Member

We must understand and recognize the disturbing and growing danger represented by the pending expiration of the LAST remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the two most prolific possessors of these weapons of mass destruction. Equally disturbing – there are ZERO, and I mean zero, active negotiations for what might replace New Start – and ZERO active negotiations with the Peoples Republic of China, who, understandably, after more than 60 years of not engaging, are now worried enough about the behaviors of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin – that they are now embarked on a decade long plan to achieve some sort of parity in the madness. And what rational head of state would not be worried hearing the irresponsible rhetoric and actions of the two world leaders that control nearly 90% of the world's nuclear weapons?

Here it is worth mentioning, again, in case anyone is not fully aware – that the United States is the ONLY nation to have used a nuclear weapon on another country in armed combat, at the end of WWII. While there is much debate over the necessity of those bombings – particularly the Nagasaki bombing – there is no debate that the effects of those two bombings, on Aug 6 and Aug 9, more than 80 years ago were so singularly horrific that the world's conscience has not afforded the space for another use of these diabolical weapons since.

UNTIL NOW.

NOW we enter a world order that no longer seeks security through cooperation and understanding – NOW we see rhetoric and behaviors reminiscent of the world order prior to WWI when the struggle for access to land, and human and mineral resources determined the world order and great powers behavior. When what mattered, as Steven Miller so recently reminded us, in his interview with Jake Tapper and what will matter again now is the new world order are to be governed again by Strength, governed by Power , governed by Force , rather than by what he referred to as "niceties" – what we might call sanity and loving our children.

These are indeed, worrisome words and worrisome times. Not that we have not had dangerous scenarios in the past.

The Korean War, The Cuban Missile Crisis, the 1973 Arab Israeli War - to name a few. But in each of these instances, those who controlled the mechanisms of the end of civilization prevailed over chaos through communication, careful diplomacy, and sane rational thinking. Over the past 80 years, we have been lulled into a false sense of security believing that such

clear communication, careful diplomacy and sane, rational thinking will always come to the fore and save mankind from its worst instincts.

I am here today to say loud and clear that this is nothing more than magical thinking—and anyone who chooses to ignore the dire warning signs are either closing their eyes to a situation they do not wish to acknowledge, or they are blissfully, nay, foolishly, unaware of the gathering storm.

For a moment, let's take a short trip through recent history—we'll begin a mere 62 years ago, on June 10, 1963, on the campus of American University – when then President John F. Kennedy delivered what has become known as the "Peace Speech" – at the height of the cold war. The rhetoric was powerful- but more important, the actions that followed were inspiring. The United States would unilaterally stop all nuclear testing and pledge not to resume if no other nation did so. And the limited test ban treaty was signed less than 60 days later- and is largely credited as being the first step toward a global nonproliferation treaty – which became a reality in 1968 – and found full force of int'l law in 1970.

Moving from 1963 to 1970 – when the NPT came into force – it represented a grand bargain – the non-nuclear weapons nations would agree to NOT develop these weapons of horrific mass destruction, and the then 5 nuclear armed states in turn – under Article VI of the treaty would agree "*to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament".*

While the rest of the world largely held up their end of the bargain – with the fervent hope that the nuclear weapons owning states would hold up their end—we failed – and largely failed humanity. To be clear, we continued the empty rhetorical service to the safety and security of a world without nuclear weapons- but tragically, we did nothing more.

Continuing on our historical journey- we jump ahead to Prague- April, 2009- where newly elected President Barack Obamas promised- " So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" - Such great hope -- Alas- a short two years later, in 2010 – that same president signed into law a full and complete nuclear modernization program – committing $*1.5 trillion* over 30 years to a complete overhaul of our entire nuclear weapons architecture. This boondoggle has ensured that the US would NOT and WILL NOT lead on the disarmament obligations all signatories to the treaty claimed to undertake under Article VI.

Finally, in one more attempt to position the US as the keeper of the Nuclear Disarmament flame, in 2020, then candidate Joe Biden spoke repeatedly on the campaign trail stating that the sole purpose of our nuclear arsenal will be deterrence –and deterrence only – with the clear understanding that the US would adopt, in effect, a **no first use policy** – which he promptly *never spoke of again* after being sworn in to office.

And now we come full circle to this moment. Martin Luther King recognized more than 60 years ago that "Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power ". Indeed, with the massive growth of scientific knowledge and lightning fast global communication systems – it is no longer possible to keep nuclear weapons technology and the accompanying scientific knowledge

bottled up to be dispensed only to whosoever “we see fit to possess it”. That ship has sailed – and so we have become, in Kings words “a nation of guided missiles and misguided men”.

And we have very little left to bargain with – save our rapidly vanishing moral authority. And with the current administration fixation on demanding that the industrialized nations of the world arm themselves to the teeth – with US made weapons and weapons systems- we now face the very real nightmare of at least a dozen , and possibly more , nuclear arme nations in the very near future.

In the last year of his life, I heard Daniel Ellsberg say on more than one occasion, “the possibility of a nuclear detonation, by design, miscalculation or accident is not 0%, it’s not even close to 0% .” And we know that the universal laws of physics and mathematics tell us that anything that is not a mathematical impossibility is a mathematical inevitability.

Our 80 history of nuclear weapons possession is replete with example after example of misunderstandings, accidents, and cold war fear where we just barely escaped a major exchange of thermonuclear weapons. And now we increase the opportunities for misjudgment by magnitudes with a new nuclear arms race with China. Adding to that risk are more nations- Iran, South Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia exploring the development of their own arsenals – all nations, with whom we have had limited history of arms control treaties or negotiations.

By a stroke of luck, or the right person being in position to exercise proper judgment in the moment, or by cooler heads at the top restraining their initial instinct—we have avoided the apocalypse.

But that should not, and cannot, be counted on to last forever. I took my degree from the University of Nevada, in Las Vegas. And I took a lot of courses in mathematics of casino games. I must tell you; I know a little about winning streaks. They don’t last forever. It is a mathematical impossibility.

We have been the beneficiaries of a fantastically long winning streak with respect to nuclear weapons. It won’t last forever. If we continue to add bullets to the chamber of the revolver we hold to our heads and to the heads of the world population in this lunatic game of nuclear Russian Roulette, our luck will run out – and we won’t get a second chance to get this right.

In the opening of the 2003 movie “The Fog of War”, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara says “The conventional wisdom in warfare is ‘don’t make the same mistake twice, learn from your mistakes.’ But there will be no learning period with nuclear weapons – you make one mistake you’re going to destroy nations”. And now we know about nuclear winter - that we will destroy more than just the belligerent participants – we’ll functionally obliterate human civilization across the planet. And we won’t get a second chance….

In this historic moment, it is incumbent on The United States, as the leading possessor of nuclear weapons to summon both the moral authority and the political will – to stand before the world and say “Mea Culpa Mea Culpa”.

We are now morally required to ***finally*** act under our obligation to the Grand Bargain that was and is the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. We must commit to no longer preach temperance from a barstool. If we are asking South Korea, Japan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other non-nuclear

weapons states to hold off on developing their own nuclear arsenals- then **we must be prepared to lead by example.**

If we are unable to do so- we will fall victim to - as Martin Luther King reminded us in New York City – one year to the day before his tragic assassination, and one year before the Nonproliferation treaty entered into force, " If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight."

Il close by paraphrasing the 1rst century sage Hillel the Elder – "If not us – who? If not now – when? "Let us hope that our children, and our children's children, will live to see the answer to that ancient philosophical question.

Should they not – it will need to be answered a thousand years or more from now – by the few thousand descendants of the unfortunate survivors of the inevitable nuclear holocaust as they continue to rebuild the shattered fragments of global society.