

Ukraine and the Nuclear Issue. “We’ve Come So Close on Numerous Occasions”. Dr. Helen Caldicott

Conversations with Libbe HaLevy and Dr. Helen Caldicott

By [Michael Welch](#) and [Dr. Helen Caldicott](#)

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“We have found it almost impossible to imagine, 30 years after the end of the Cold War, that there could be a nuclear war between the United States and Russia, but the crisis in Ukraine is putting exactly that possibility on the table again.”

– Dr. Ira Helfand, former president of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War [1]

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The nuclear gun will soon be taking a shot at a mostly indifferent public. In this author’s opinion, if the hammer is about to fall, the trigger was most likely pulled in Ukraine.



During the now two week military incursion by the Russian armed forces, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant experienced power cuts to its

critical cooling system which keeps its radioactive fuel rods from overheating. Electric generators are the system's back-up when such an emergency takes place, however it is estimated the diesel which fuels the generators will only last about 48 hours. [2]

If the fuel isn't replaced soon, the water keeping the rods cool will start to evaporate. And once they are exposed to the atmosphere, the country' in the north end of Ukraine and in Belarus will have a new kind of villain entering the picture: radioactive releases. [3]

Meanwhile, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant at which Russian forces had supposedly fired missiles, allegedly caused a fire in the five-story training facility building. The fire has since reportedly been put out. According to Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba, blowing up Zaporizhzhia, would result in a disaster "10 times larger" than that of Chernobyl in 1986. [4]

And even beyond the prospect of an accidental collapse, or meltdown of one or more of it's [15 nuclear reactors](#), there is the threat posed by the reappearance again of a nuclear war. As of the 27th of February in relation to "aggressive statements" and tough financial sanctions from leading NATO powers, President Putin put Russia's nuclear deterrent forces on high alert, and ordered those forces be put in a "special regime of combat duty." This suggests Russia could actually use them! [5]

On this week's Global Research News Hour, we provide part two of a series on Russian's actions in Ukraine with a special look at the nuclear question with two major anti-nuclear observers.

Our first guest is Libbe HaLevy, the host and producer of the weekly show [Nuclear Hotseat](#). She talks about the above mentioned threats within Ukraine. She also deals briefly with the Fukushima Daiichi collapses from 11 years ago, and talks a little about her experience living within a mile of the Three Mile Island Nuclear Reactor when it experienced a partial meltdown 43 years ago this month, and how that experience focused her attention on fighting against atomic power. She particularly highlights her brand new website - [nuclearhotseat.com](#) - which highlights MAJOR upgrades as of March 17th!

Our second guest is the legendary anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott. For nearly half an hour she talks briefly about potential Ukrainian reactors being destroyed, but largely about nuclear weapons entering the war time-fray, and the risk of escalation to a ballistic exchange, deliberate or accidental, between Russia and the United States. And she adds her most recent information on the disaster, disease, and death stemming from the ongoing Fukushima catastrophe.

Libbe HaLevy is producer/host of Nuclear Hotseat Podcast - [www.NuclearHotseat.com](#) - and author of the book [YES, I GLOW IN THE DARK: One Mile from Three Mile Island to Fukushima and Nuclear Hotseat](#). Her play ATOMIC BILL AND THE PAYMENT DUE, about betrayal of humanity at the dawn of the Atomic Age, will be published summer 2022.

Dr. Helen Caldicott is a physician and co-founder of [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#). She was a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize, the recipient of the 2003 Lannan Prize for Cultural Freedom, and author or editor of several books including [Nuclear Madness: What You Can Do \(1979\)](#), [If You Love This Planet: A Plan to Heal The Earth \(1992\)](#), [The New Nuclear Danger: George W. Bush's Military-Industrial Complex\(2001\)](#), and [Sleepwalking to Armageddon \(2017\)](#).

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Transcript – Interview with Dr. Helen Caldicott, March 8 2022

Part One

Global Research: Thank you for joining us, Dr. Caldicott. I'm delighted to have your back in the show again.

Helen Caldicott: Thank you, Michael.

GR: Well, let's start with Ukraine. Before we talk about the threat of nuclear attacks on rival factions, could we focus on the threat of radiation just within Ukraine. Russia has invaded the country, it seems, and two nuclear facilities have been seized by Russian forces: the decommissioned Chernobyl in the north, the facility that exploded back in 1986 and contaminated the region, and the Zaporizhzhia facility in the south, which is still functioning, and it's also the biggest nuclear plant not only in Ukraine but also all of Europe. So what kinds of dangers stand out for you about how this war could generate or exacerbate the dangers of a nuclear catastrophe, adding to the catastrophe posed by Chernobyl back nearly 36 years ago?

HC: Well, it's very, very serious. No one would ever have thought of soldiers taking over a nuclear power plant, but that's what's happened. The Russians have taken over Chernobyl, and although it's obviously not operating, it needs operators to keep it stable, and that's very serious. And then, they have taken over the Zaporizhzhia power plant which contains six, six nuclear reactors. In fact, there are fifteen nuclear reactors in the Ukraine.

If the Second World War had been fought today with nuclear power plants all over Europe, Europe would be uninhabitable for the rest of time. So nuclear power plants do not go well with war. You know, one missile hitting a nuclear power plant could cause a meltdown and contaminate a huge area. In fact, 14% of the European land mass currently is still radioactive from the Chernobyl meltdown.

I don't buy European food because I don't know what food has concentrated the isotopes, particularly Turkish food. They got a huge fallout from Chernobyl, and the Turks were so angry with the Russians, they picked all the radioactive tea and sent it to Moscow.

So we're sitting on the verge of two catastrophes, two nuclear catastrophes. One, a meltdown or shocking accident at a nuclear power plant, and there are more reactors as I see it in the Ukraine, or, and or, and or, a nuclear war. Now it's always been my horror to imagine that Russia and America would confront each other, because both have thousands of nuclear weapons aimed at each other. A hundred, a thousand nuclear weapons dropping on a hundred cities would induce nuclear winter and cause a short Ice Age and the end of most life on earth.

The Ice Age would last about ten years, and that would happen because cities burn huge clouds of toxic, black, oily, carbonated, radioactive smoke launched into the stratosphere and block out the sun for up to ten years. And, you know, that's it. Very, very cold, and we'd die.

But the problem is that these weapons are on hair-trigger alert. In America, there are 450 nuclear missile silos in the Midwest armed or operated by two young men, each man has a pistol, one to shoot the other if one shows signs of deviant behaviour. They operate with floppy disks and telephones that sometimes don't work, they take drugs, they go to sleep on duty. If they get a message that they're under attack, they have three minutes to decide whether or not to launch. And it's a short text they get to tell them to launch.

We've been close to nuclear war on numerous occasions. Very few of these occasions are reported to the press or in the press to the public, and we are standing on the edge of catastrophe. I don't like to think about it too much, but in the middle of the night I sometimes wake up and have this intense fear in the pit of my stomach.

And for the Russians to invade Ukraine, like they have, and for the Americans to react the way they have, the Americans are so God damn self, I mean, they think they're God's gift to the world. The Americans have 800 bases in 80 countries, military bases, they're metastasize like a cancer all over the world, and Putin, when he was in a more sane mode, before he, I think, lost the plot, asked America not to include the Ukraine in NATO, and to remove the weapons, the missiles that are placed, I think, they...

Since the end of the Cold War, when James Baker, Secretary of State, promised Gorbachev that NATO would not enlarge into these newly liberated countries, NATO has enlarged from five to twenty-eight countries. And, in those countries, they're all armed with American missiles. And he feels very threatened, and I don't blame him. I mean, imagine if the Warsaw Pact came to Canada, your country, and put missiles all along the border. Well America would probably blow up the world like it nearly did in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In fact, I got to know Robin McNamara, Secretary of Defense with Kennedy, quite well. And he and I became quite close friends, and he said, Helen, he said, you don't know how close we came and the Cuban Missile Crisis to a nuclear war. Three minutes. Three minutes. So we're standing on the edge of an nuclear precipice. Most humans don't understand this, the media doesn't attend to this, it attends to absolute rubbish most of the time to keep people enjoying things, but not to teach them what's actually happening.

In the 80s, we did have a huge movement to freeze nuclear weapons, and it ended up, in 1988, at Reykjavik, where Reagan and Gorbachev met, and over a weekend too mere mortals, men, almost agreed to abolish nuclear weapons. My God. And that was the culmination of our work when we educated the doctors and others about the medical effects of nuclear war. Eighty percent of Americans supported what we were doing. We had a million people in Central Park protesting the nuclear arms race. I met with Reagan in the White House for an hour and a quarter holding his hand, trying to teach him about nuclear war, after which he said nuclear war must never be fought and can never be won.

And then he met with Gorbachev, but unfortunately Edmund Teller had got to him, that monster who created the hydrogen bomb, and he thought that a missile defense was the answer. Like, that Russian missiles can come in and bounce off. Gorbachov knew it would never work. And he should have said to Reagan look, you now have your missile defense but let's abolish nuclear weapons. But the opportunity was lost. Therefore, we may destroy evolution.

GR: I think you should repeat the fact that there have been instances not of actual attacks but of near nuclear war occurring by accident. I remember the story of a Russian officer

named Stanislav Petrov, that the Russians saved the world by simply not reporting what was believed to be five ballistic missiles were headed for the Soviet Union, and the launch was flashed on the screen, I believe this was September of 1983. I mean, if he had followed protocol and reported it to a senior Kremlin official, the world would likely be in nuclear war and we would all be extinct by now. But he didn't.

HC: We've come so close on numerous occasions...a flight of geese nearly set off the mechanism in America to launch nuclear weapons. A rising moon. America launched a weather satellite in Norway, I think, some time ago...they informed the Kremlin that they were going to do it, but the Kremlin lost the data. And when the Russians saw it, they thought America launched the first strike against Moscow, and luckily, they realized it was, you know, not a first strike. But, by God. I don't...I really... Michael in all conscience I don't know how we're still here.

GR: Oh my. Yeah, I mean...

HC: And the worst thing is I mean, you never could imagine Russia and America going to war against each other because they have all these bloody missiles all ready to go and their submarines and their ships and on land and one tiny mistake or error as we just talked about could launch the whole thing.

I don't trust Biden is far as I could kick him. I think he's a weak man. He's employed neocons who helped to destabilize Ukraine the Maidan Square massacre, all of these neocons want to destroy Russia and that's what they're on their way to doing or trying to do. Biden I don't think you, there's a very rude expression in Australia, I won't use it to describe someone who doesn't really know what he's doing. We're in the hands of men, and one woman, Victoria Nuland, who, you know, it's might or right. And that's what's always started wars.

Men have always fought and killed. Why? Why kill? I mean I'm a doctor. I spent my life trying to save lives and how precious life is, how precious. And then there's the military industrial complex in America, you know, over half the discretionary budget in America - texts - goes to build more weapons. These people are evil. It's not the Department of Defense. It's the department of murder. Because they murder. Since 9/11 they've murdered over one million people. And made a lot of profits. And the war now in Ukraine is causing the stock market in military equipment to go through the roof. That says it all. How dare they! How dare they!

GR: I don't know if you can address this point, and forgive me if this it's a question that you're not capable of answering, but it seems as if there is a difference between the way things work in reality with the operating officers and the soldiers on the ground and such, and the way things happened at official levels with Biden and all these people making grand decisions. For example, the Petrov example I mentioned earlier. I was just wondering if in your talks and in your explorations of both levels if you have insight into how these differences matter. Does anything spring to mind about where these differences can matter on the grand stage?

HC: What differences?

GR: Well in terms of a, I mean on the one hand you have the presidents making a grand decision or something, and then maybe on the lower level, like a mid-level officer or something they might hold off or something like that?

HC: Well look, it's huge, it's massive, to recount and document all the near-misses we've had of human behaviour. You see, I think the US has pushed Putin to the point where he's lost the plot. He's not behaving in a rational manner. Some of my colleagues think that he's got a round face, that he might be on steroids, which helps to build body function, he likes that, or else he's sick. And steroids can produce psychosis.

So, you know, to arm the world like a ticking time bomb ready to blow up any minute, not even imagining who will be in charge of these things, and how they could develop a brain tumour or psychosis or get sick or do something, you know, have a fight with their wife or get the flu or, I mean human beings are totally fallible and even, when you look at yourself, you're fallible. You do some crazy things sometimes. Each of us do.

But to arm and to have these things on hair trigger alert with a 3-minute decision time it's absolutely insane. It's insane. And then they say, oh, it's the Department of Defense and America is free. They're not free. All lies. All lies. What we should be doing is making friends with all the countries in the world. China. You know, look what China has done in a few years from people starving, millions in poverty, to one of the richest countries in the world. It's brilliant what they've done! They're not an enemy! Why do countries think that they have to dominate each other? This is very testosterone oriented. I'm very sick of testosterone, Michael.

Intermission

Part 2

GR: About forty years ago you raised the medical dimensions of a nuclear holocaust and that scared a hell of a lot of people into action, myself included. And now it seems as if those fears have gone away.

HC: I think that, I think that the television... What do you call your Commonwealth broadcasting commission? Canadian Broadcasting Commission? They should replay If You Love This Planet. It's only half an hour long. It looks old because the haircuts are different, but it's totally relevant now, and it reduces people almost to tears, and they suddenly get it in their gut what it would mean to have a nuclear war, and therefore I strongly prescribe that the Canadian Broadcasting Commission replay If You Love This Planet in a good time and advertise it, broadcast.

GR: Okay, I'll put in the request for sure. I wonder, can we maybe move back, because... Like I say, this broadcast is going off on the eleventh anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi disaster, as I mentioned at the beginning. Do you have an update for us?

HC: Yes, I do. Fukushima, they will never, ever decommission those melted down reactors. The radiation levels that workers are exposed to are horrendous. They can't get near the melted fuel. They're trying to remove huge pipes in reactor one where there was a hydrogen explosion that vented radioactive gases at the time of the accident. And those pipes are so radioactive that they're giving off 16 rems per hour, and the workers are only allowed to get 5 rems per year. So they're lethal doses of radiation.

The Yakuza, which is the mafia in Japan, are recruiting or collecting harmless people off the streets of Tokyo etc. and taking them up to run these reactors...or to work on those reactors where it's so radioactive. I mean these people are going to die of cancer, obviously. Number

one.

So they'll never ever decommission them. And they will be nuclear tombstones, if you like, for the rest of time. They have now a million tons of highly radioactive waste stored in tanks because they have to continuously pour seawater into the damaged reactors to keep them cool, and then that comes out and it's very radioactive. So they've been storing it in tanks, hundreds and hundreds of them. If you go to the Fukushima website, you'll see these tanks beside each other.

And they want to empty this into the Pacific Ocean. Now the fishermen are very upset, because the fish will become very radioactive. What happens is, when you put radioactive elements like iodine and strontium and cesium into water, they bio-concentrate by orders of magnitude at each level of the food chain. Algae, crustaceans, little fish, big fish, us. You can't taste, smell, or know that you're eating radioactive food. So you eat some fish with cesium-137 in it and it goes to your muscle in your pancreas or your thyroid, it irradiates just a very small volume of cells for many years with beta radiation, electrons. Some regulatory genes in the cell get mutated, and the cell is not regulated anymore and starts to reproduce in terms of millions and trillions of cells, and that's a cancer.

So the incubation time for developing a cancer is any time from five to fifty years. When they cancer arise, it doesn't denote its origin, so you don't know. The only way we do know is to do epidemiological studies and take irradiated populations like Hiroshima and Nagasaki or Fukushima, except they're not doing that in Japan, they're covering it up, and compare that population to non-radiated population to see what the elevation of abnormalities is. So it's very serious.

GR: Do you have any... I mean we're in that five-to-thirteen-year range now...are there any unusual clusters of cancer cropped up?

HC: Good question Michael. Well, the Japanese government are not looking at the victims at all. All they're studying is thyroid cancer. Now all cancers and leukemias can be caused, or are caused, by radiation. Post Chernobyl, the Russians collected five thousand medical and scientific papers and published them, and... it seems that over a million people in Europe and Russia, Belarus, have died from cancer and the like.

But the Japanese are only looking at thyroid cancer, thank you very much. In children who were aged under eighteen at the time of the accident. And there's a very elevated number of cancers in these people. Some have metastasized...but they're not looking at leukemia or any other cancers or birth defects or anything.

What is happening in Japan is medically criminal. Medically criminal. How dare they? And who runs the Japanese government? Really, the nuclear power industry really run the Japanese government. So, and these, and they don't know what they're doing, and most politicians are scientifically and medically illiterate, they think nuclear power is very powerful, they have no idea.

The doctors are desperate. Some doctors have moved away from the Fukushima area, they just can't stand what they're seeing, and if the doctors even allude to patients that their diseases may be related to Fukushima, they get struck off by the government.

GR: Well I'm wondering...

HC: That's evil!

GR: Yeah, I'm wondering though, in terms of buying Japanese food, especially Japanese fish, is it banned? No it's not!

HC: Well, Hillary Clinton signed a deal just after the accident that she would import Japanese food and would not prohibit it. I went to a sushi restaurant in New York a few years ago, and it was lovely, you know posh and sake and well-dressed people, and I said where does your fish come from? It comes from Japan. [laughter]

Don't eat Japanese food! The Fukushima prefecture is a very rich area in growing food. The radioactive rice, they dilute it with non-radioactive rice and sell it. Don't buy Japanese seaweed. Don't buy Japanese food because you don't know where it's been sourced. Or what they've done with it, and they're not measuring for radiation.

GR: Okay, we only have a couple of minutes left. I just wanted to ask you maybe one more question. As basically, if you had the opportunity to talk either to President Joe Biden or President Vladimir Putin or somebody like that, what would you do? What would you say to try to impress upon them that the threat that's posed today?

HC: Well, I would try and get through their psychic numbing. And I'm a doctor so I'm used to doing that with patients of course. And I would describe the medical effects of one bomb dropping on New York, or one bomb dropping on Washington, or Moscow – to get into their gut. To understand the medical implications – the environmental implications of what this means, and try and get them to understand that they must actually abolish nuclear weapons. And there is a proposal at the United Nations which has been signed by – oh I don't know – over 60 nations, to abolish nuclear weapons.

I try and bypass the military industrial complex and all these stupid men surrounding these presidents to try and get them to understand. I've cut it with Reagan what really could happen. I'd love to meet with Biden. And Putin – well...

I mean Putin asked President – what was his name? President...

GR: Zelinsky?

HC: No. Putin asked if Russia could join NATO. And the president said no, you're too big. He's BEGGED the Americans not to let Ukraine join NATO. And why didn't they agree to that? They still could agree to his requests. But, I mean, if their pride comes before a fall, pride comes before the end of life on earth. That's what's happening.

And they're all men! All men.

GR: Well, I think we're going to have to close it now Helen Caldicott, as you end on that odious note. But I want to thank you for ...

HC: Hahaha!

GR: ...for being a woman! For coming on at this most important issue. Thank you once again for joining us on the Global Research News Hour!

HC: Yes, and thank you for what you do Michael. And much love to Michel!

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Notes:

1. https://www.democracynow.org/2022/2/23/the_threat_of_nuclear_war_ukraine
2. Seth Borenstein (March 11, 2022), 'EXPLAINER: What's behind latest scare at Chernobyl plant?', The Associated Press; <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/explainer-whats-behind-latest-scare-at-chernobyl-plant/>
3. ibid
4. Maroosha Muzaffar (March 7, 2022), 'Ukraine says fire has been put out near Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant', Independent; <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/ukraine-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-plant-fire-b2028358.html?src=rss>
5. Molly Blackall (February 27, 2022), 'Putin puts Russia's nuclear deterrent forces on alert as global tensions grow amid Ukraine invasion', inews; https://inews.co.uk/news/putin-russia-nuclear-deterrent-forces-alert-global-tensions-grow-ukraine-invasion-1487031?ico=in-line_link

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