

Peace on Earth And Atom Bombs



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THE CHRISTMAS theme of peace on earth has been profaned, regrettably, by the men who control the nuclear switches.

They still engage in nuclear diplomacy, and the horror weapons are poised in their silos and submarines ready for the ultimate holocaust.

In less than a dozen years, there have been at least three nuclear confrontations. The latest occurred only last October, as Soviet attack submarines targeted on U.S. warships and both superpowers ordered their forces on alert.

The public has been given only the sketchiest details of the incidents that could have ended in nuclear devastation. Here are the stark facts, which men of good will would do well to ponder while the carolers sing of peace on earth.

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DURING the 1962 missile crisis, as the world is aware, John Kennedy ordered our nuclear forces on red alert. Our intercontinental missiles on land and our Polaris missiles under the sea were ready to fire. Our B-52 bombers were in the air so they wouldn't need to waste time taking off.

President Kennedy threw a naval blockade around Cuba, calling it a "quarantine," with orders to stop Soviet missile shipments from entering Cuban waters. Nikita Khrushchev responded with a blistering secret message.

When Soviet ships, loaded with Cuba-bound missiles, arrived at the crucial spot, however, the orders from Moscow turned them around.

Mr. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban confrontation made a deep impression on Richard Nixon. He spoke admiringly of the cold courage Mr. Kennedy had demonstrated when he faced an imminent nuclear explosion.

In December 1971, President Nixon had an opportunity to stage his own nuclear showdown in the Bay of Bengal.

While Pakistan and India fought over the dreary, humid, painfully impoverished piece of earth now called Bangladesh, the United States, Russia and China issued orders. Armies and navies with hydrogen-headed missiles responded.

The world was spared, but none of the big powers can take credit. The war was not ended by the menacing moves of the Russians, Americans and Chinese, but by the collapse of the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh.

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AGAIN, at the height of the latest Arab-Israeli war in October, the United States and Russia moved their nuclear forces on the world chessboard.

Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, in a blunt secret message declaring "I will say it straight," called upon President Nixon to join him in sending troops to stop the alleged Israeli cease-fire violations. Otherwise, he threatened to send in Soviet troops unilaterally.

The President responded instead by ordering a worldwide military alert. The Soviet forces never left Russia. Tensions were relaxed. But once again, mankind had taken a step dangerously close to the nuclear brink.