A recent poll conducted by Pew Research analysed what people around the world see as the greatest threat to their safety and society. Nuclear weapons still rank high on that list; particularly in Latin America, Russia, Japan and Turkey. Up to 49 percent of those surveyed in Turkey saw them as “the greatest threat to the world.”

In the world of nuclear, “always/never” refers to the dilemma of making sure a nuclear warhead will always be launched and detonated when so ordered, but never under other circumstances.

In Command and Control, Eric Schlosser details the USA’s history of nuclear near misses. Schlosser ultimately concludes that, nowadays, tensions between India and Pakistan present the greatest risk for nuclear weapons use or incident.

A collection of prominent American political figures, including Henry Kissinger, have written that many of the weapons-holders’ nuclear policies are mired in Cold War conventions, despite the vast changes in the world’s geopolitical landscape. Many nuclear material sites are poorly secured in light of modern threats and verification protocols remain secretive and obtuse.

In an earlier 2011 article, the same group tackled the concept of nuclear deterrence as it applies today. They concluded that deterrence as it stands now is untenable and that “Progress must be made through a joint enterprise among nations, recognizing the need for greater cooperation, transparency and verification to create the global political environment for stability and enhanced mutual security.”

The 2014 Russian military intervention in Ukraine represents a threat to the non-proliferation movement. Born nuclear, Ukraine relinquished its nuclear arsenal to Russia in exchange for security assurances by Russia, the US and the UK. But following the Crimean crisis, and persisting tensions nuclear deterrence could gain more attention.

With the advent of the Internet, it was inevitable that cyber-warfare and nuclear security would cross paths. As Vincent Manzo reports, one such instance was the use of “Stuxnet”, a US computer worm designed to damage Iranian centrifuges. Due to a coding error, Stuxnet began replicating itself far beyond its programmers’ intentions and spread throughout the network.

Too Close for Comfort, a Chatham House publication, documents both historical and contemporary cases of nuclear weapons incidents and finds that “the probability of inadvertent nuclear use is not zero and is higher than has been widely considered.” Their conclusions mirror UNDIR’s in this respect.

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