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Two and a Half Minutes to Doomsday

From Marine Le Pen to Benoît Hamon, the presidential hopefuls are dancing on a volcano

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We are heading for a planetary catastrophe, we are living on a powder-keg with a lighted fuse, or, if you prefer, at the foot of a volcano about to erupt. Meanwhile France's candidates for the role of nuclear button-pusher are doing a belly-dance in front of the fuse, or, if you prefer, a farandole on the tip of the volcano. It's a magnificent spectacle. They are magnificently unaware.

Apocalypse Now

For 70 years, the atomic scientists have periodically reset the Doomsday Clock, a symbolic clock that places humanity more or less close to « midnight », i.e. the absolute catastrophe that could destroy us all. In 1954 after the first US and Russian H-Bomb teses, it was two minutes to midnight. At the start of the 1980s it was again that close. Twice in the autumn of 1983 humankind nearly slipped into nuclear war. Between 1991 to 1995, after the end of the Cold War, the long hand was moved back to 17 minutes to midnight. But in 2015 it placed humanity at 3 minutes to midnight. And now the atomic scientists have shifted it to two and a half minutes. We are not far from the worst moments of the Cold War.

According to the scientists, « world leaders have failed to deal with the two greatest threats to our existence : nuclear weapons and climate change ». « In its last two annual reports on the Doomsday Clock, the committee issued this alert : 'The probability of a world catastrophe is very high and the actions required to reduce the risks of disaster need to be taken very quickly'. In 2017, we judge the danger to be even greater and the need for action even more urgent. It is two and a half minutes to midnight, the Clock is ticking, world danger is threatening. The official authorities need to act immediately to pull humanity back from the brink of the abyss. If they don't, then wise citizens will have to come forward and show them how. »

According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the negative factors are, « the widespread extension of virulent nationalisms, the utterances of President Donald Trump about nuclear weapons even before his inauguration on 20 January, and a general darkening of the security landscape, characterised by increasingly sophistical technology and a growing contempt for scientific expertise ».

One can mention other factors too.* But the major threat is still linked to atomic bombs, which total over 15000, some of which can be detonated at any moment if ordered by one of very few individuals in the world, literally uncontrolled and uncontrollable - or even by mistake or by accident, as has almost happened several times over the last 70 years.

An Emergency Exit Hidden to the French People

In this dramatic context the citizens of France, victims of a secrecy pact - an organised political and media blackout of these matters - do not know that in two months, on 27 March, all the member states of the UN, whether nuclear-armed or not, are invited to New York for a first session of negotiations aimed at creating a treaty to ban these weapons. This session will prepare for a second one, between 19 June and 7 July, tasked with working out a draft treaty which will be submitted in autumn to the UN General Assembly. If the French people have heard nothing about this major event, unprecedented in nuclear history, that is because the press and media have deliberately ignored the decision taken by the General Assembly on 23 December 2016 to convene this conference in 2017. 113 states voted to ban nuclear arms likethe other so-called « weapons of mass destruction », the biological and chemical ones. 35 states, including France, voted against : clearly a reason why our leaders and opinion-makers chose not to mention it. But it becomes increasingly embarrassing for France not to honour a treaty she has ratified (the NPT) whose Article VI, dating from 1970, obliges the nuclear states to negotiate the elemination of their own

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nuclear arsenals.

Even more embarrassing is the dislocation of the nuclear states' united front. Three other nuclear states and NPT signatories - USA, UK and Russia - joined France is opposing a ban, as did one nuclear state outside the NPT, Israel. But China, India and Pakistan abstained, and North Korea even voted in favour ! If you can no longer hide behind a rogue state to justify your own refusal to honour international law, where are you heading ?

National Conspiracy of Secrecy

Now that the Chinese head of state, echoing Obama, has proposed in Davos to build a world without nuclear weapons, it becomes even harder to mask this perspective. Yet the French conspiracy of silence continues to impact two other national facts, horrific for the champions of the nuclear strike-force and unpleasant for those of its adversaries who are deeply suspicious of the common people and give priority to the need to maintain or acquire a monopoly of the anti-nuclear struggle over the desire to successfully together abolish it.

Firstly, despite the myth of a « national consensus in favour of deterrence », a myth carefully maintained by its partisans, it turns out that, according to an IFOP poll requested by ACDN in October 2015, 74% of French citizens already had a wish (before the opportunity offered by the UN) for « France to negotiate and ratify with all the states concerned a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear weapons, with mutual and international control that is strict and effective. » Admittedly, that was only one poll and things may have shifted since. But to verify the majority wishes of the people and give it legal force, there is a simple unquestionable tool : a referendum. And in 2015, French citizens did want to be consulted by referendum on that very question. Nearly three-quarters said they were ready to support a parliamentary initiative to do this (27% « certainly », 47 % « probably »).

This wish to support multilateral nuclear disarmament naturally varies according to people's political sensibilities. So it is remarkable that it crosses all parties, and everywhere (according to the IFOP poll study) links an absolute majority of voters : from 63 % among the Front National supporters (63% of those who voted Marine Le Pen in 2012) to 94 % among EELV voters, via 72 % of Républicains (74 % of those who voted Sarkozy), 78 % of UDI voters (72 % of those who had voted Bayrou), 80 % of PS voters (81 % of those who elected Hollande) and 88 % of the Front de Gauche (89 % of those who voted Mélenchon).

While caution is needed in interpreting even the most serious polls, we can certainly affirm that there is a national consensus in France - but not for keeping French nuclear weapons : no, for eliminating them at the same time as other nations. And here is the last political fact that is being scandalously hidden : there really is right now a possibility of organising a referendum on this question. Literally, over a hundred parliamentarians (111 as on 20 January 2017) reject the «no comment » policy practised by the current government and all its predecessors to right and left. Although several of these MPs and senators are close to the ruling majority and even belong to the Socialist Party, they nevertheless want France to take part in the current abolition process. In addition, they want the people to be consulted by referendum on the subject. Joining actions to words, they have signed not only an Appeal for a Referendum on France's participation in nuclear abolition but a Parliamentary Bill to organise that referendum by the procedure called « shared initiative, parliamentary and citizen ».

Article 11 of the Constitution requires that a bill be supported by one fifth of parliamentarians - and so this means that 74 signatories must be found from among the 814 parliamentarians (minus some deceased) able to sign. This bill will then be submitted to the Constitutional Council and, once approved, must garner after 1 August 2017 the support of 10% of registered voters, through electronic means supervised by the Ministry of the Interior - people voting either by personal computer or at the town hall or through an official specially authorised. 10% means the support of about 4.5 million voters, which is a lot, but given a timeframe of nine months that should not be too difficult...

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Thus the French people, seldom given a direct say, could use the Constitution (which requires respect for treaties and for human rights) to open the path for a world without nuclear weapons. The people could show more sense than their leaders...

The Presidential Hopefuls : all or nearly all love the Bomb! **

The idea of seeing the people gatecrash the nuclear issue (the presidential hunting reserve) scares most of the « major candidates » seeking the Presidency. For them, we must not « lower our guard » or risk one day losing that nuclear button and that black suitcase that carries it. What an asset for a man - even if he might be a woman. All or nearly all intend to keep and enhance France's nuclear strike-force. For Marine Le Pen, "our concept of nuclear deterrence will be reaffirmed and clarified. It must remain the foundation of our defense strategy and the ultimate guarantee of national security and independence. ». Ditto for François Fillon : we must "maintain the nuclear deterrent force and prepare its modernisation", and for Manuel Valls. Both of these men want to hike the military budget up to 2% of GDP, as was requested in Dember 2016 by the military head Pierre de Villiers, so as to greatly improve their conventional capacity while continuing to modernise the nuclear forces.

As for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who favours a phase-out of nuclear power-plants, for him nuclear deterrence « remains the essential element in our protection strategy » even though it « must eventually become obsolete. » Meanwhile he favours « abandoning the airborne component » which he judges « obsolete ». Would he go as far as to place on the negotiating table « the strategy itself » and all the « components » of the so-called « deterrence » - on the table of the ban treaty negotiations that begin in two months?

That would be nice, but we cannot dare to expect so. He replied to our questionnaire in 2012, but not to our latest one (only one candidate has replied so far, Nathalie Artaud, which says something about the others - but she is not a very credible candidate, and she intends to preserve indefinitely the jobs of all the workers in nuclear weapons and nuclear power).

As for Emmanuel Macron, one would like to know his views, but it would be surprising if this lover of nuclear power (« a resolutely modern choice ») did not love the bomb. Fortunately there is still Benoît Hamon who calls on « France's heart ». Does he have his heart in his hands, his hand on his heart?

Well, not at all. He is from Brest in Brittany where he father worked on the naval shipyards. He is not content to want to keep all the nuclear subs based there (as he told *Libération*) and to envision the building of two new nuclear aircraft-carriers (as future successors for the Charles-de-Gaulle, and its companion vessel).

Left-leaning voters may be tempted by his speeches, but should tell each other : Benoît Hamon is not the man to avert the catastrophe. On the contrary, he has the same faith in nuclear weapons as Manuel Valls, François Fillon et Marine Le Pen. And he pushes it even further, wanting to hike the « defense and security budget » to 3% of GDP (it is heading that way), asking like Fillon for this budget to be excluded from the deficit calculation ; and also saying that « our European partners should strengthen their logistic and finncial support for external operations conducted by France » (as Fillon does also) and should increase their own military expenses, and should acknowledge France's leadership in this domain since France is now the only EU state that has a « complete military toolbox », the only one that can protect Europe by nuclear deterrence, after Brexit and the announced withdrawal of the « American umbrella » by President Trump.

So at last we will touch the political and military dividends of our nuclear strike-force. It matters little that this nuclear « Maginot line » costing over 300 billion euros is militarily unusuable (as President Giscard thought in 1973), that it is absurd, immoral, criminal and suicidal, and that our European partners certainly do not want it. With « a defense

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apparatus as big as our ambitions » we will be able to defend France's rank : « France's rank enables us to propose cooperation on frontier defences which could compensate for the disengagement of the US » (2nd debate in the citizens' primaries). What innovative language : France's Rank, Our Ambitions !

She is a beautiful and intelligent France whose heart Benoît Hamon wants to set beating ! She threatens the world, but she is fraternal ! She is democratic ! At this point the would-be head of state sounds like an old-style hero. We are warned : « his hand will not tremble » (Benoît Hamon applies this formula to his attitude confronting the lobbies that poison us, but it can be extended and applied to the finger on the nuclear button.) Does this posture derive from unawareness, or from a form of imposture ? Perhaps both. But why should we entrust our lives to that man rather than others ? That is what he is asking us to do.

The Last Chance for Nuclear Disarmament

None of the 7 candidates in the socialist primaries, the so-called« citizens' primaries » saw fit to answer the three questions sent by ACDN on 4 December. Among them were three MPs : Benoît Hamon, Sylvia Pinel (now a supporter of Manuel Valls), and François de Rugy. None of the three signed the Appeal for a Referendum or the Referendum Bill which was sent to them, as to all the parliamentarians, several times since March 2016.

We must conclude that so far only one candidate has indicated his intention to « replace the strategy of nuclear deterrence by a nuclear-free European sanctuary, and to engage in active diplomacy for nuclear disarmament ». That is Yannick Jadot (75th proposition of "la France vive"). He has not signed the Referendum Bill, because he is an MEP, not a Paris parliamentarian. But at the time of the EELV Primary he signed the Appeal for a Referendum - the only one to do so.

Logically he should be supported by all those for whom the motto « Liberté, égalité, fraternité » still means something. But he himself admits he has no chance of becoming President of France.

What means of expression to French citizens of all tendencies have if they want France to take part in abolishing nuclear weapons ?

Only one : write to their MPs and senators - locally or more widely - asking them to sign the Referendum Bill now - before Parliament's last meeting, scheduled for 24 February. That leaves barely four weeks for this REFERENDUM SUR LA PARTICIPATION DE LA FRANCE L'ABOLITION DES ARMES NUCLEAIRES to have a chance of taking place.

A chance to put back the Doomsday Clock a little !

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Notes

***** The rise of Jihadist terrorism, in the Near east and Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Israel...), in South-East Asia (Korea, Japan, China, India and Pakistan...), growing tension between Russia and the West since the annexion of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, marching boots on both sides of the Russian frontier (concentration of US

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tanks and troops, advanced antimissile radar, NATO military manoeuvres, a passive defense exercise involving millions of Russians, nuiclear threats by Putin...) great migratory flows etc. Without mentioning the direct and indirect effects of climate degradation, the depletion of resources of earth, mines, energy, food, and demographic rise. It seems there are better things to do that to make and maintain massacre weapons, in whose shadow there have been other massacres, by « conventional » or « asymetric » arms, and other atrocities, and ongoing devastations of nature, and miseries and misfortunes and injustices.

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Cf. Palmarès nucléaire des briguants de la République

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