

Making *The Invisible Event* Visible

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An introduction to making *The Invisible Event* freely available as an online PDF at <http://www.ilankelman.org/menard/InvisibleEvent.pdf>, courtesy of the author Stewart Britten and the publisher Menard Press.

In 1984, when I wrote *The Invisible Event*, jingoism was in the air in the USA and Britain.

We don't want to fight but by Jingo if we do,

We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too.

With the attitudes of the political leaders of the time, the level of risk felt high. That has changed, but the risk does not depend only upon the bellicosity of political leaders.

The report *Too Close for Comfort* published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 2014 shows how little the risks have changed in the intervening 30 years. The Chatham House publication makes scant reference to the perception of risk, risk-taking and decision making in conditions of uncertainty, covered in Chapters 7 and 8 of *The Invisible Event*. From the incidents in *Too Close for Comfort* as well as those in *The Invisible Event* it is clear that it is in the sphere of human error that the greatest risks lie. In the years since 1984 nuclear command and control have no doubt been improved. But humans are the same and subject to the same errors of judgment as always.

The feature film *The Man who Saved the World* released in 2014 highlights how much could hang upon the judgment of one person. In 1983 an alarm went off at a Soviet nuclear early warning centre and screens indicated that five American nuclear missiles were heading toward the Soviet Union. Had Stanislav Petrov, a colonel of the Soviet Air Defence Forces, followed protocol, a retaliatory response would have been released. It is thanks to his forbearance that the alarm was identified as false.

The fact that first atomic, then nuclear, weapons have been in existence for 70 years without accidental detonation is no cause for assurance. For all the intelligence which went into their invention, it is easier to invent than to obliterate an invention. In fact to relegate any technology, however dangerous, to a universal dustbin of history is virtually impossible. We even retain the smallpox virus. That means that so long as 'civilisation' survives we must prevent risks from nuclear weapons being realised. And we know from history that sooner or later whatever risk lies in our path will be realised.