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## Chernobyl Remains a Warning Against a New Nuclear Arms Race

Nathan Gardels

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This week marks the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe. More than an accident, it was the beginning of the meltdown of the Soviet Union and defrosting of the Cold War. [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) has written that Chernobyl “was an historic turning point” and “perhaps the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union five years later.” The secretive, cover-up culture of the Soviet state, he recalls, kept timely information from getting to the top so a quick response could be formulated. “The Chernobyl disaster, more than anything else,” says Gorbachev, “opened the possibility of much greater freedom of expression, to the point that the system as we knew it could no longer continue. It made absolutely clear how important it was to continue the policy of glasnost.”

The Russian nuclear physicist [Evgeny Velikhov](#), who led the belated emergency effort to shut down the Chernobyl reactor, told colleagues at the time that this is, “Worse than Hiroshima. That was only one bomb, whereas here the amount of radioactive substances released was ten times greater, plus half a ton of plutonium.” As Velikhov told me later in Moscow, the accident made all too real the abstraction of nuclear war and fueled the sentiment of the top Soviet leaders for winding down the arms race with the United States. Ironically, three decades later Ukraine is once again the flashpoint between Russia and the West, now feeding the opposite sentiment toward a new buildup. As former U.S. Defense Secretary [Bill Perry](#) wrote recently in the *WorldPost*, “the risk of nuclear catastrophe is greater today than during the Cold War.”

Writing from Chernobyl, [Ioana Moldovan](#) is alarmed at what might happen to the aging nuclear reactors in Ukraine as recession debilitates maintenance and civil war threatens not far away. [Najmedin Meshkati](#), who has visited both Chernobyl and Fukushima in Japan, worries that complacency and poor “safety culture” at nuclear power plants portends more accidents. These [360 degree photos](#) show what a ghost town Chernobyl still is.

This week also marked the one-year anniversary of the earthquake in Nepal. [Mariela Magnelli](#) tells the inspiring tale of how women have been at the heart of the emergency relief effort. In his role as U.N. special envoy for global education, former British Prime Minister [Gordon Brown](#) calls for a change in our thinking about humanitarian aid to places like Nepal, which, in his view, should also include funds for schooling. “Humanitarian aid,” he writes, “rests on the belief that a crisis is a short-term event lasting days, week or months, not years. From Syria to Sudan, history says otherwise.”

World Reporter Charlotte Alfred notes that the return this week of opposition leader Riek Machar to serve as vice president is a major breakthrough for peace in [South Sudan](#). Reporting from Kilis, Turkey, WorldPost Middle East Correspondent [Sophia Jones](#) tells the story of refugees who fled their homes in Syria only to be faced with deadly rocket barrages on the other side of the border where they had hoped to be safe. Nobel laureate [Jose Ramos-Horta](#) and others laud a new generation sympathetic to the travails of migrants. This generation, they write, “identify with one another more than they ever have in the past. They are the #StarWarsGen: just as no one cares where you are from on Endor or Coruscant in ‘Star Wars,’ for these kids, being from planet Earth is enough information, thank you very much.”

“[Forgotten Fact](#)” this week focuses on the tragedy in Fallujah where as many as 60,000 civilians have been caught, and starving, in this ISIS-controlled city under siege by Iraqi government forces. Former top Iranian official [Hossein Mousavian](#) and analyst [Sina Toossi](#) say the future of the nuclear deal is under threat — and it’s not Iran’s fault. If the U.S. does not uphold its part of the bargain, they write, “years of diplomacy will be undone and a zero-sum mentality will once again take hold between the two countries — with disastrous consequences for the region.”

Philosopher [Slavoj Zizek](#) reviews a new film by Udi Aloni that made waves at both the recent Berlin and Tribeca Film festivals. For Zizek, the message at the heart of *Junction 48* is that, “Palestinians do not need the patronizing help of Western liberals; even less do they need the silence about ‘honor killing’ as part of the Western leftist’s ‘respect’ for Palestinian ways of life. These two aspects are the two sides of the same ideological mystification.” [Kristin Szremski](#) details how her photographs of a trip to Palestine were auto-generated in a Google album labeled “Trip to Israel.”

Writing from Manila in advance of elections in the troubled Philippines, [Richard J. Heydarian](#) scores the “autocratic nostalgia” for a Marcos-like strongman who will put messy democracy aside and establish order.

U.N. Special Envoy for Malaria [Ray Chambers](#) is optimistic that, “The end of malaria is within our grasp. Now it is our collective obligation to meet the call.” But Under-Secretary General of the United Nations [Philippe Douste-Blazy](#) worries about a new resistance to insecticides by

malaria-bearing mosquitoes. In a podcast with former U.S. Ambassador David Shinn, [Eric Olander](#) and [Cobus van Staden](#) explain how Turkey hopes to capitalize on the fall of Chinese investment in Africa. These charts on economic slowdown and labor unrest offer a snapshot of China's "new normal."

In an eloquently written meditation on relativity and quantum theory, science journalist [George Musser](#) suggests why space and time might be an illusion. He writes of ashes not turning into ashes, but into "nothingness" in black holes and questions how the big bang could be the beginning of time.

We report that [Elon Musk](#) announced his plan this week for SpaceX to land on Mars by 2018. "Either we spread Earth to other planets," he says, "or we risk going extinct." Watch this [360-degree](#) scan of Mars, captured by the Curiosity Rover and check out how NASA is using [space-age technology](#) to track and stop air pollution on Earth. Our [Singularity](#) series looks at the nanomachines that could drive the medical revolution of the future. You'll want to visit the beautiful "blue city" of Jodhpur, India once you see these pictures. Finally, Sikh artist [Baljinder Kaur](#) paints a "wonderland of spirituality." "As a Sikh," she says, "there is no distinction between what is or isn't spiritual."