



# Taking the Long View in a Time of Great Uncertainty

## Living in Interesting Times

Jack Jekowski  
Industry News Editor and Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee

“May you live in interesting times” is a statement that you may have often heard when individuals reflect on dramatic changes that lie ahead.<sup>1</sup> I have used it myself in conversations, more frequently these days, when it seems that the world around us has become too complex or is being turned on its head.

As this column goes to print, we are seeing an escalating war of words and demonstrations of military might between the United States and North Korea, with President Trump threatening to totally destroy North Korea if the United States were forced to defend itself or its allies,<sup>2</sup> and launching ever-threatening bomber test runs in the Korean Peninsula with fighter escorts from South Korea and Japan.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, North Korea is saying it will test a hydrogen bomb in the Pacific Ocean,<sup>4</sup> and that the United States has declared war.<sup>5</sup> There is also growing concern across the international community that President Trump will not certify the Iran Deal compliance, and tensions continue in the Middle East and the South China Sea.

These and many other events in

the global community, which have been explored in more detail in recent “Taking the Long View” columns,<sup>6</sup> overwhelm the senses, sometimes even beyond the “interesting times” catchphrase.

### Another Successful Annual Meeting

The 58th Annual Meeting in Indian Wells, California, this past summer provided an opportunity for more interesting times in our own world, as the Technical Program Committee, under the leadership of Teressa McKinney, continued to test new formats to provide greater value for participants and to better engage attendees in these important discussions. On Tuesday afternoon, word of an unusual panel session quickly spread via social media in real time, including through a new Annual Meeting app called *Whova*. The session featured two concurrent presentations by Sig Hecker, who spoke about the lab-to-lab initiative he led in the 1990s and the new two-volume history of those events, entitled “Doomed to Cooperate: How Lab-to-Lab Nuclear Cooperation Helped to Avert Post-Cold War Nuclear Dangers.”<sup>7</sup>

Subsequent, closely linked presentations by Harvard’s Matt Bunn and the Nuclear Threat Initiative’s Leon Ratz followed through with concepts stimulating the audience on how we now need to view the current world through new glasses. As word spread on the new social media conduits, the large room quickly filled to an overflowing standing-room-only crowd as attendees sat (and stood) transfixed on the expertise relating events at the end of the Cold War to the current-day environment.

As we move into 2018, the EC is continuing to plan to host a Global Security Summit that would engage technical and policy experts, as well as Institute membership, to synthesize current data and information and develop the top priorities for the Institute to address in the future. Many of the challenges the world faces today, which make these interesting times, would be the subject of conversation. These top priorities would then become focus areas for special sessions during the Annual Meetings, serve as a basis to identify potential topics and speakers for plenary sessions, and provide opportunities for special workshops.

### Closer to Home

We are also experiencing some interesting times within the Institute with the deployment of the new Strategic Plan<sup>8</sup> and the change in our association management contractor from Kellen to Association Headquarters (AH). AH’s new executive director for the INMM management contract, Lacy Lee Baker, spent the week in Indian Wells becoming familiar with the

*This column is intended to serve as a forum to present and discuss current strategic issues impacting the Institute of Nuclear Materials Management in the furtherance of its mission. The views expressed by the author are not necessarily endorsed by the Institute, but are intended to stimulate and encourage JNMM readers to actively participate in strategic discussions. Please provide your thoughts and ideas to the Institute’s leadership on these and other issues of importance. With your feedback, we hope to create an environment of open dialogue, addressing the critical uncertainties that lie ahead for the world, and to identify the possible paths to the future based on those uncertainties that can be influenced by the Institute. Jack Jekowski can be contacted at [jjjekowski@aol.com](mailto:jjjekowski@aol.com).*



Annual Meeting activities and meeting senior Institute leadership. As we move into the new Institute year, we will all be working with Lacy Lee and the other staff at AH to ensure a smooth transition. We do so recognizing the extraordinary efforts of the Kellen staff over the years, including Patricia Sullivan, whose passion and personal efforts ensured the success of the *JNMM*, and who helped many authors (including myself) provide professionally presented materials.

One objective of the Institute's new Strategic Plan was to improve the Institute's website (to "make the INMM website a more effective tool"), which is now live at [inmm.org](http://inmm.org)—check it out and provide feedback to Headquarters or through your local INMM chapters. We can use our website and other new technology media to leverage the collaborations offered by INMM in these interesting times to help solve the myriad of issues we are dealing with in today's complex world.

## Endnotes

1. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May\\_you\\_live\\_in\\_interesting\\_times](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_you_live_in_interesting_times) for information on this quote, which became popular in the 20th century but continues today to be attributed to an ancient Chinese curse. Another reference ([www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/may-you-live-in-interesting-times.html](http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/may-you-live-in-interesting-times.html)) states: "No one is sure who introduced the term but the person who did most to bring it to the public's attention was Robert Kennedy. In a speech in Cape Town in June 1966, Kennedy said: 'There is a Chinese curse which says "May he live in interesting times." Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they
2. Holland, S., & Mason, J. (2017, September 18). If threatened, U.S. will "totally destroy" North Korea, Trump Vows. *Reuters*. Retrieved from [www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-trump/if-threatened-u-s-will-totally-destroy-north-korea-trump-vows-idUSKCN1BU0B3](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-trump/if-threatened-u-s-will-totally-destroy-north-korea-trump-vows-idUSKCN1BU0B3)
3. US flies stealth jets and bombers over Korean peninsula amid tensions with Pyongyang. (2017, September 18). *Telegraph*. Retrieved from [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/18/us-flies-stealth-jets-bombers-korean-peninsula-amid-tensions](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/18/us-flies-stealth-jets-bombers-korean-peninsula-amid-tensions)
4. Berlinger, J., & Ullah, Z. (22 September 2017). North Korea could test hydrogen bomb over Pacific Ocean, says foreign minister. *CNN*. Retrieved from [www.cnn.com/2017/09/21/politics/kim-jong-un-on-trump-comments](http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/21/politics/kim-jong-un-on-trump-comments)
5. This was not the first time that North Korea had declared an incident to be a declaration for war. See Adams, B. (25 September 2017). For perspective: The North Koreans interpret everything as a "declaration of war." *Washington Examiner*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/for-perspective-the-north-koreans-interpret-everything-as-a-declaration-of-war/article/2635544> See also Hurlburt, H. (25 September 2017). Wait, are we at war with North Korea now? *New York*. Retrieved from <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/09/wait-are-we-at-war-with-north-korea-now.html>
6. Jekowski, J. Taking the long view in a time of great uncertainty: All things nuclear. *JNMM*, 45(4), 24–28.
7. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=81ZpFLO4hmE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81ZpFLO4hmE) for a short video and [www.amazon.com/Doomed-Cooperate-American-Scientists-Post-Cold/dp/0941232441](http://www.amazon.com/Doomed-Cooperate-American-Scientists-Post-Cold/dp/0941232441) for the book.
8. See [www.inmm.org/Members/Strategic-Plan](http://www.inmm.org/Members/Strategic-Plan)