

# PERSPECTIVE

**A**RE WE BLITHELY DOWNPLAYING the threat posed by nuclear weapons just as many of the characters in the movie “Don’t Look Up” ignore the danger posed by a doomsday comet on a collision course with Earth?

The Connecticut Committee for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons pushed that correlation in fliers the group handed out in the Garde Arts Center lobby after a screening of the film March 24, part of the Garde’s Winter Cinema Series.

But in trying to make the case that humanity is being deceived by those who argue that nuclear weapons provide security, the group itself acted deceptively — mistakenly, it says.

The Netflix movie, which I watched at the Garde, features biting, on-target satire. It depicts a society obsessed with celebrities and their conflicts and escapades. The movie reveals a place and time where the merit of a topic is measured by how many internet clicks it can generate. It shows vain and shallow leaders who care little about solving problems but are obsessed with maintaining power and gaining adherents.

In other words, it holds up a mirror to our time.

In this movie world a pair of scientists cannot seem to get anyone to take seriously the threat to humankind, or get political leaders to turn to scientific solutions when they do acknowledge the danger.

Obvious are parallels with how the nation has dealt with, or failed to deal with, the pandemic and climate change. But the peace advocates see a parallel to nuclear weaponry as well.

## Who said what?

“Like both the Dibiasky Comet (in the movie) and climate change, nuclear war is inevitable if we do not address it immediately,” warns the flier.

Imagine my surprise when, perusing the flier at home, I saw these quotes attributed to The Day:

“Stop wasting resources on weapons that could bring global destruction.”

“Redirect spending from weapons to things that ensure our future.”

When seeing comments attributed to “The Day,” I think of the editorials authorized by the editorial board. As editorial page editor for more than 14 years, having retired from that role last September, I knew we never wrote those things. Our editorials have consistently supported submarine construction at Electric Boat and, while supportive of efforts to reduce nuclear weapons through negotiations, the board has acknowledged their deterrent value.

I recognized where those “quotes” came from. The first was the headline I wrote for a guest commentary submitted by Frida Berrigan and Joanne Sheehan and published in The Day opinion section on Jan. 22, 2021. The second was a headline another editor wrote for a guest commentary written by Berrigan and published this past Jan. 20.

These headlines were meant to capture the sentiments of the authors. They were not Day opinions. Our sense of fairness in giving the anti-nuclear activists a chance to make their case had been exploited to make it seem as if The Day

officially supported it.

Berrigan, who lives in New London, is a member of the city’s Green Party, which advocates for dramatically reducing defense spending. Sheehan is a lifelong pacifist, an organizer with the War Resisters League and co-founder of the Community Coalition for Economic Conversion.

The nuclear disarmament group includes the War Resisters League, St. Francis House, CT Green Party, the Voluntown Peace Trust, and the

Hartford Catholic Worker.

Using the email address provided on the flier — you know, the one folks were supposed to contact if they want to join the movement — I wrote to the coalition Tuesday asking about the deceptive quotes. No one checked that email all week, explained Green Party leader Ronna Stuller of New London when she finally responded Friday afternoon. The attribution was a mistake, she wrote.

“I should have caught that,” stated Stuller. “You are correct that it was misleading.”

## Hearing all voices

These activists play a role in our civil discourse. While most folks celebrate the jobs and economic opportunity generated by submarine construction at EB, these activists provide a discomforting reminder about the purpose of these weapons. Driving the massive job growth at EB, for example, is the development of the next generation of nuclear ballistic missile submarines.

The Navy plans to utilize a dozen of these Columbia-class submarines, with a projected cost of \$7.2 billion per ship. Taxpayers will spend these billions on something the U.S. hopes never to need. The purpose of these underwater launching pads is to dissuade any nation from contemplating a nuclear attack on the United States or its allies. Each will carry 16 missiles armed with multiple warheads. They could unleash a devastating response.

Such an exchange of nuclear weapons would end civilization as we know it.

I think we would all like to live in a world that does not need such weapons, or in which humanity does not turn to mass killing to address disputes, and where resources now spent on weapons would address other priorities.

Unfortunately, that is not yet the world as it is.

The potential for a nuclear exchange has for 75 years made war on a massive scale unthinkable. Europe, the nexus for two world wars in the 20th century and with a history of near endless conflict in preceding centuries, has not seen war in the nuclear age, at least not until Vladimir Putin ordered the Russian military to attack Ukraine.

Do national security priorities drive all military spending priorities? It would be naïve to think so. Certainly, the motivation behind some weapon development is corporate profit and campaign contributions. Not all defense spending is good, and it should not be accepted on blind faith. President Eisenhower warned us of that.

Yet it is also naïve to think we can suddenly move past it all, or unilaterally disarm.

In its flier, the anti-nukes committee cites Ukraine as a turning point.

“The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine is proving just how precarious the international situation really is,” states the flier I picked up at the Garde.

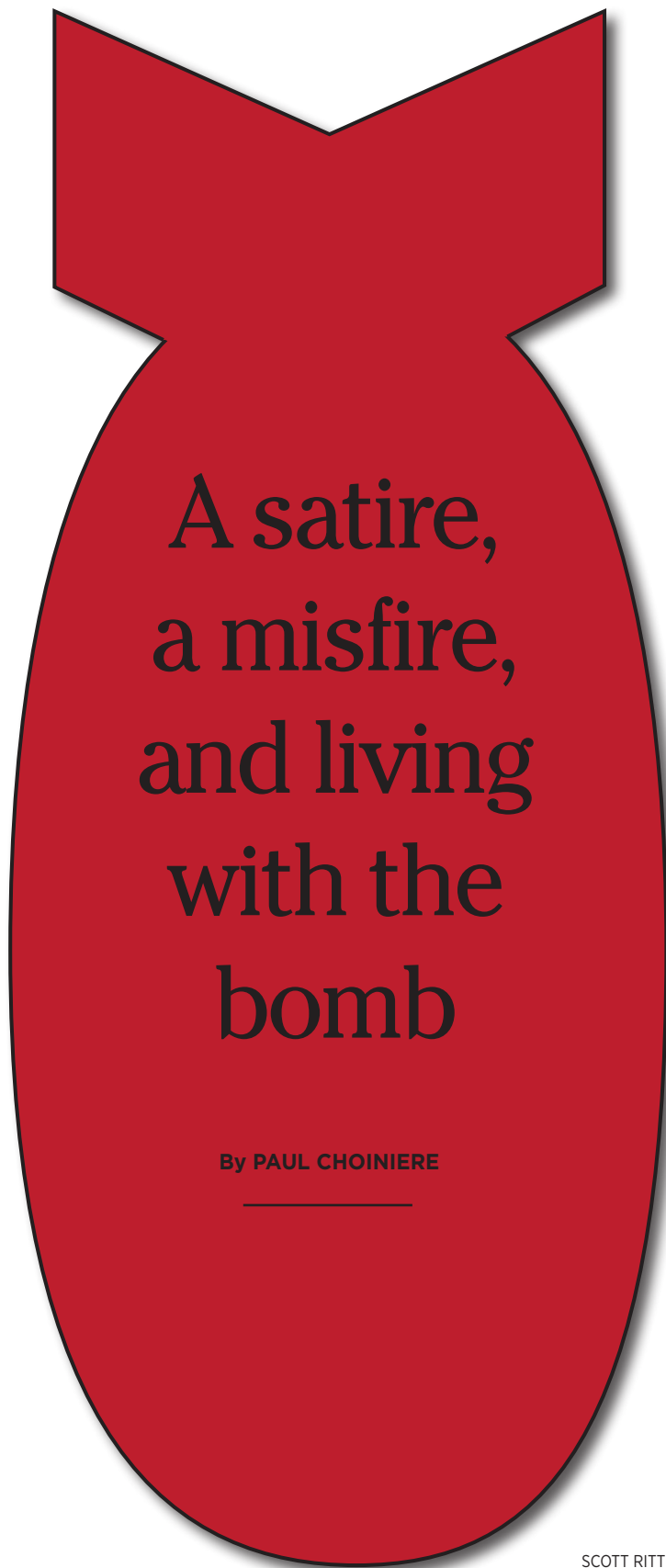
Perhaps.

But I would also note that Ukraine, soon after gaining independence from the Soviet Union, agreed in December 1994 to surrender the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviets. In return, Russia vowed to respect Ukraine’s sovereignty.

Would Putin have invaded a nuclear-armed Ukraine? Unlikely.

A deterrent? An evil? A necessary evil? As the debate goes on, it is important to hear all voices. Just don’t put words in my mouth, or that of The Day.

**Paul Choiniere is the former editorial page editor of The Day, now retired. Reach him at p.choiniere@yahoo.com.**



A satire,  
a misfire,  
and living  
with the  
bomb

By PAUL CHOINIÈRE

SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY

## What Putin the hockey player doesn’t understand

By KEN DRYDEN

**V**LADIMIR PUTIN likes hockey. Every year, he builds an ice rink in the middle of Moscow’s Red Square. For any occasion he can devise, he puts on his hockey equipment and plays.

It’s not a surprise that Putin feels as he does. Russians love hockey for the same reason Canadians do. It comes straight from their landscape, from winter, from cold. It punishes us, but at the same time absorbs us, so

### Obliterating Mariupol doesn’t make you tough.

we almost don’t feel its pain. To play hockey, you have to be tough, in lots of ways. And Russians are tough. Tough enough to survive their history. To survive Leningrad.

But there are a few things Putin doesn’t understand about hockey. One is that when he dresses in his hockey gear and skates with real players, and those players let him skate by untouched, and goalsies flounder to one side, letting him score five, six, seven times — real hockey players, real goalsies, don’t do that. Except maybe once in awhile, and not for anyone over the age of 5. A real hockey player would never ask it, expect it or allow it.

Putin also seems not to understand about hockey something that might relate to this moment: The tough are initiators, they deliver hard, devastating hits, but the really tough take those hits . . . and keep going, to win in the end. Just like in Leningrad. Obliterating the Ukrainian city of Mariupol doesn’t make you tough.

There’s something else that Putin doesn’t understand about hockey, and



Russian President Vladimir Putin, second right, takes part in a 2015 ice hockey match in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Russia.

about sports generally. I’ve been thinking about this because September will mark the 50th anniversary of the eight-game series in which Canada’s best hockey players faced Russia’s best for the first time.

Russia had begun to play hockey only in 1946; Canada had originated the game more than 70 years earlier and its players were regarded as undeniably the best in the world. Yet, because professionals couldn’t compete against amateurs, the Russians (tech-

nically, the Soviets) had been winning the hockey “World Championships” year after year and were called world champions.

Finally, in 1972, Canada had its chance. The result would be a smashing, overwhelming victory and celebration for the nation that invented the sport.

Except in Game 1 in Montreal, the Russians won 7-3. The series wasn’t decided until Game 8, when Canada’s Paul Henderson scored with 34

seconds left. I was one of Canada’s goalies. Putin, then a 19-year-old law student in Leningrad, surely watched.

The series, as he would have seen, was the most passionate and hard-fought in both countries’ hockey histories. It had to do with nationalism and the politics of the Cold War. It had to do with the games themselves. The Russian players didn’t like what we did to them, and we didn’t like what they did to us. It was Us vs. Them.

Yet, surprising to players on both

sides, those feelings of hatred softened gradually, until another, deeper feeling set in. The same feeling that has been experienced by those in other bitter sports rivalries — Celtics and Lakers, Yankees and Red Sox, and many others. It’s born of the realization that each pushes the other beyond what they think possible, forcing them to be better than they’ve ever been. Hatred and blind partisanship give way to respect and appreciation — a sense of shared humanity is revealed. Us vs. Them becomes US.

Until a few weeks ago, Canadians and Russians were planning to celebrate the 1972 series together, with Canadian players traveling to Russia, and Russian players coming to Canada. Such a shared celebration, we players have come to understand, would only be right.

Now, the reunion likely won’t happen. It’s too bad. Too bad for the players, too bad for Canadians and Russians who lived through that historic competition. And too bad for Putin, who surely would have been there, part of those celebrations, and could have observed firsthand how nationalism can give way to something more enduring.

He will miss seeing his great players, proud Russians, and Canadian players, proud Canadians, feel proud about something that doesn’t entirely have to do with being Russian or Canadian. Taking all this in, Putin might have finally gained a sense of what it’s like to be a real player. He might have come to understand that no matter how geopolitics divides us, humanity lies beneath.

**Ken Dryden, a former goaltender for the Montreal Canadiens and member of the Hockey Hall of Fame, was a member of Canada’s Parliament from 2004 to 2011.**