

## Six minutes to midnight

FOR 16 YEARS, the *Bulletin* clock has moved steadily toward midnight. Since January 1984 it has stood at three minutes before the hour. But recent events—the U.S.-Soviet treaty to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), the improvement in superpower relations, and the increase in international and nongovernmental efforts to reverse the arms race—demonstrate that the world's dangerous course can be changed. In recognition of these developments, we now turn the clock back to six minutes to midnight.

After so many steps in the wrong direction, the INF Treaty is a step in the right one. For the first time the United States and the Soviet Union have agreed to dismantle and ban a whole category of nuclear weapons. They have crafted provisions that enable each to be confident that the other will comply with the treaty's terms. The agreement they have fashioned can serve as a model for future accords. That agreement would not have been possible without the leadership displayed by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan. We applaud them.

Although the INF document was signed at the recent Washington summit meeting, it will not formally take effect until ratified by the U.S. Senate. Ratification is vital. Failure would inflict long-term damage on the arms control process and could put the arms race back at full throttle. President Reagan withstood opposition from the political far right in signing the treaty. Now the ratification debate will test his resolve. It will give him an opportunity to erase the skepticism resulting from his previous assaults on arms control and his pursuit of military superiority.

General Secretary Gorbachev's signing of the INF Treaty indicated that its content already had been ratified by the Soviet government. Given the closed character of that system, it is unclear what political price he paid to gain support for the treaty from military and political leaders. Under Gorbachev the Soviet Union has consistently taken initiatives in the arms control arena, for example, by instituting a unilateral 18-month moratorium on nuclear tests in 1985-86. The shift in Soviet foreign policy, coupled with Gorbachev's call for domestic reform and openness, has contributed to the improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations. Those relations will be further enhanced if the Soviets continue on the course toward internal liberalization.

The United States and Soviet Union are the driving forces of the global nuclear arms race, but other nations also participate and all will be affected if war erupts. In recent years some nations, such as New Zealand, have taken concrete action to end their acquiescence to the arms race. Others have become active in establishing nuclear-weapons-free zones or participating in projects like the Five Continents

Peace Initiative. Still others have actively worked for an end to bloody regional conflicts in Central America, Asia, and elsewhere that carry the risk of superpower confrontation.

In addition, individuals and nongovernmental organizations continue to vigorously promote better understanding and collaboration among peoples. Notable among the successes is the nuclear test site monitoring agreement between the private Natural Resources Defense Council and the Soviet Academy of Sciences. These actions are a source of hope.

The INF Treaty, combined with improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations and greater international concern about common security matters, are significant first steps in a new direction. We salute that change in direction by moving the clock away from midnight. Yet, these welcome developments sharpen our awareness of what remains to be done. The



*The treaty, improved superpower relations, and international efforts for common security are steps in a new direction.*

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INF Treaty, it is important to remember, leaves intact more than 95 percent of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arsenals.

If the promise of recent events is to be realized, the INF Treaty must be the first of many measures aimed at reversing the arms race and creating a new international security regime. The next steps might include a multilateral agreement on conventional forces in Europe, talks aimed at preventing superpower military intervention in other countries, a comprehensive test ban, and the negotiation of deep reductions in the number of strategic nuclear weapons. The last, given a boost at the recent summit, will require reaffirmation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the imposition of limits on both the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative and similar Soviet work on ballistic missile defense. Neither side is likely to agree to reduce its long-range nuclear weapons by half and then further if the other side is building up defensive systems to neutralize the remaining retaliatory force. Substantial U.S.-Soviet progress on these issues is requisite for the superpowers and the rest of the international community to effectively curtail the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The challenge of establishing a just and peaceful world remains. But now, for the first time in years, steps have been taken in the right direction. The full significance of those steps will be determined by what follows. □