



4 minutes to midnight

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The hands move closer to midnight

For the past 12 months, the *Bulletin* Clock has stood at 7 minutes before midnight but events have not stood still. As the year 1980 drew to a close, the world seemed to be moving unevenly but inexorably closer to nuclear disaster. The Clock must record this movement.

The somewhat flawed but carefully balanced and patiently negotiated second phase of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty with the Soviet Union appears to be out the window. Nuclear weapons—more and more unambiguously aimed at war-fighting rather than war-deterrence—are now being rapidly deployed by the East and the West in Europe. The Russian SS-20 and the U.S. MX blatantly announce a new race in improved missile accuracy and mobility, heralding the acceptance of counterforce first-strike by both sides.

These ominous signs of deterioration are cast into starker relief by the flat unwillingness of either the United States or the Soviet Union to reject publicly, and in all circumstances, the threat of striking the other first. Both sides willfully delude themselves that a nuclear war can remain limited or even be won. In 1980 both sides officially declared nuclear war “thinkable.”

At the same time, there has been not progress but further retrogression in the responsibility shown by the developed part of the world toward the underdeveloped two-thirds. For more than the past decade, but now given bland and complete sanction by OPEC-induced balance of payments difficulties, the oil-rich and the technology-rich have both callously accepted the plight of the poor. The betrayal is now made official by the publicized resolve of the two superpowers to expand their military programs beyond the already astronomical global figure of \$600 billion per year. Meanwhile large areas of the developing world remain crippled by poverty that soaring energy costs have only intensified.

Given this setting of tragic destabilization the *Bulletin* Clock takes another step toward doomsday—to 4 minutes before midnight.

The U.S.-USSR arms race demands our most urgent attention, but the deteriorating international scene with all of its ramifications must be recorded: civilian hostages held in violation of international law for more than a year, the war between Iraq and Iran, the continued

fighting in Afghanistan, the testing of a bomb in the atmosphere by China, the increasingly brutal repression of human rights and political freedoms in northern and southern countries alike, and confrontation in Poland and in South Africa. No part of the world has been wholly free of increasing hostilities and conflict.

We would be less than candid if we were to say that the recent U.S. elections did not figure in our pessimistic estimate of the world situation. We are concerned about the defeat of the experienced and committed Senators who in years of intensifying crises have spoken out for arms control and disarmament. Particularly in the uncertain and shifting times that lie ahead, their moderating influence will be missed. It is all the more welcome, therefore, that the new Administration has professed a desire to restrain the arms race with the Soviet Union and to seek new possibilities for negotiating a slowdown in the introduction of new weapons of mass destruction. Such statements are always significant; subsequent actions consistent with them would be even more so.

Let us reemphasize the goal for the 1980s outlined on these pages one year ago. The avoidance of nuclear war is the first of all priorities. Whatever our visions for the future—getting from here to there must be our overriding concern. So we must first buy time. But we must buy it for a larger purpose: the universal recognition that international disputes cannot be settled by nuclear war. The principle of no-first-use (ultimately the principle of non-use) must become the cornerstone of all relations between nations.

The entire world is at a threshold. During the last decade, each year has seemed to bring us closer to a nuclear holocaust. So far, the new decade has seen this trend accelerating. But this fact, discouraging as it is, must not lead us to despair.

There are signs in many nations of a growing public concern over the drift toward disaster. Our immediate task is to find means of taking hold of this concern and converting it into an international accord to eliminate the threat of global nuclear suicide. The seemingly inevitable advance of the warning hand to midnight can and must be reversed in the months to come. □