As we enter the new year, hope is eclipsed by foreboding. The accelerating nuclear arms race and the almost complete breakdown of communication between the superpowers have combined to create a situation of extreme and immediate danger.

In response to these trends and as a warning of where they lead, we have moved the Bulletin’s “doomsday clock” forward by one minute—to three minutes before midnight. It is a measure of the gravity of the current situation that only once in our 39-year history—in 1953 in response to the advent of the hydrogen bomb—have we seen fit to place the warning hand any closer to midnight than it stands today.

Over the last decade the clock has moved steadily forward, never back. We last advanced it three years ago in response to the development by the superpowers of nuclear weapons designed for war-fighting rather than war-deterrence. Since then this trend has only accelerated, carrying us ever deeper into a new, more dangerous phase of the arms race. Captives of a tortured logic, the superpowers are pursuing security by means of weapons and strategies that can only produce insecurity. In so doing they are collaborating in an assault upon the basis of the only true security to be had at this point in history: mutual deterrence grounded on the knowledge that to wage nuclear war is to commit national suicide.

The growing momentum of the arms race over the last three years would be reason enough to reset the clock. But it does not stand alone; something else has been happening during these years, and especially over the last few months, something we view with great alarm. In so doing they are collaborating in an assault upon the basis of the only true security to be had at this point in history: mutual deterrence grounded on the knowledge that to wage nuclear war is to commit national suicide.

The moving of the clock should thus not be construed as a counsel of despair. It is an expression of alarm, a warning, a call to attention. Let us also make it an occasion for rededication to the effort to bring the resources of our culture—language and rational argument, the methods of science and the lessons of history—to bear on the arms race. The odds may be long. But it is our deepest conviction, as scientists and citizens, that there is no other way. □

— The Editors