A new era

With this issue, the Bulletin resets the Bulletin Clock from 10 to 17 minutes until midnight. The clock is in a new region because we feel the world has entered a new era. Never before has the Board of Directors moved the minute hand so far at one time. Conceived at the dawn of the Cold War, the clock was designed with a 15-minute range. John A. Simpson, one of the Bulletin’s founders, says that a 15-minute scale was all anyone thought would be needed in their lifetimes. The present move was not easily agreed upon. Board members initially expressed divergent views as did some of the sponsors of the Bulletin. But on balance a consensus was reached reflecting a conviction that the world was changing in fundamental and positive ways.

Foremost are the developments in East-West relations. The Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty was revived and promptly signed. Shortly thereafter hardliners in the Soviet Union mounted a coup that quickly failed and, among other results, significantly reduced what might have been years of negotiations between our two countries. Then, on September 27, President George Bush announced the withdrawal of thousands of tactical weapons. Many strategic missiles were taken off hair-trigger alert, as was the B-52 bomber fleet. On October 5, President Mikhail Gorbachev announced similar initiatives and upped the ante by indicating that the Soviet Union would suspend nuclear testing. We hope the United States will have a positive response.

The Cold War is over. The 40-year-long East-West nuclear arms race has ended. The world has clearly entered a new era. Never before has the Board of Directors moved the minute hand so far at one time. Conceived at the dawn of the Cold War, the clock was designed with a 15-minute range. John A. Simpson, one of the Bulletin’s founders, says that a 15-minute scale was all anyone thought would be needed in their lifetimes. The present move was not easily agreed upon. Board members initially expressed divergent views as did some of the sponsors of the Bulletin. But on balance a consensus was reached reflecting a conviction that the world was changing in fundamental and positive ways.

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ar deeper reductions in nuclear weapons stockpiles must follow. The Bulletin has long reported on the destructiveness of seeking military solutions to the world’s ills, and it will continue to do so. It has long reported on the economic distortions and human misery caused when the nations of the world pour vast sums of money and intellectual capital into weaponry—as they still do even though the paralyzing shadow of nuclear apocalypse has faded. We will aggressively examine the opportunities presented by the end of the East-West nuclear arms race.

We are encouraged by East-West agreements to conduct on-site inspections, and by the improvement of technologies for verification. The experience of the Gulf War offers many lessons, one of the most significant being the increasing role for the United Nations in resolving conflict and blocking aggression. The Bulletin must and will continue to address these issues as well as the proliferation of weapons, the conditions of nuclear power, and environmental concerns that threaten the long run the well-being—indeed, the security—of all peoples.

We believe that presidents Bush and Gorbachev have guided their respective nations to a historic intersection of mutual interests. Continuing boldness and imagination are called for. Men and women throughout the world must vigorously challenge the bankrupt paradigms of militarism if we are to achieve a new world order. The setting of the Bulletin Clock reflects our optimism that we are entering a new era.