

Ten minutes to midnight

A solitary Chinese man standing in the path of a column of tanks. Demonstrating South African women being attacked by police dogs. A playwright named president of Czechoslovakia. The bodies of six Salvadoran priests. All are faces of human courage in the struggle for freedom and dignity.

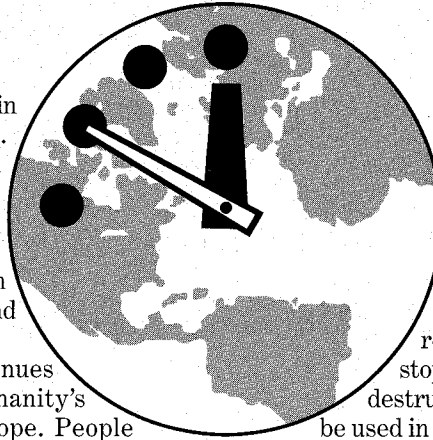
While aware that the struggle continues around the world, we rejoice in humanity's momentous victory in Eastern Europe. People revolted against the communist leaders whose power, exercised through rigid bureaucracies and brutal police apparatuses, ultimately rested on the Soviet army. This time, in contrast to 1956 and 1968, the Soviets did not intervene.

Now, 44 years after Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech, the myth of monolithic communism has been shattered for all to see, the ideological conflict known as the Cold War is over, and the risk of global nuclear war being ignited in Europe is significantly diminished. Although success is in no way guaranteed, this is the greatest opportunity in four decades to create a safe, sustainable world. In response, we turn back the hands of the *Bulletin* clock four minutes, to stand at 10 minutes to midnight.

The Cold War mindset interpreted world events through the distorting prism of East-West conflict. The competition was labeled "cold" to distinguish it from World War II, a hot war where guns were fired, bombs exploded, tens of millions of people killed. Yet, during the past 45 years approximately 125 wars were fought, more than 20 million people killed.

The conflict was cold only in that World War III did not happen. Aside from the close call in Cuba in 1962, U.S. and Soviet leaders didn't square off in a direct fight that could have led to nuclear disaster. Instead, they grudgingly respected each other's right to police their respective empires, demonstrated restrained opposition to each other's bloody interventions in Vietnam and Afghanistan, fought proxy wars, and profited by becoming the world's largest arms suppliers. They popularized language that segregated most people on earth into a separate "Third World."

Through it all, the people of the United States and Soviet Union put the world at greater risk than at any time in history. Mesmerized by Cold War rhetoric, they allowed, even urged, their governments to build massive nuclear arsenals, amounting today to one million times the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb. Until those arsenals are eliminated, the danger persists that an accident, a miscalculation, or irrational act will cause nuclear holocaust. We urge speedy conclusion of a U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) as a next step.



Rapid progress toward nuclear disarmament by the superpowers and other nuclear-armed nations has become urgent for other reasons. Domestic strife in a nation with nuclear weapons stockpiles opens the possibility that weapons could fall into the hands of unstable groups. Furthermore, deep reductions would strengthen the case for stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and minimize the risk that they will be used in regional wars. All nuclear weapons tests should be halted.

Due to Cold War rationales, the two military superpowers are organized as national security states upheld by vast military and intelligence bureaucracies and shielded from public scrutiny by layers of secrecy. These powerful infrastructures must now be dismantled and sensible defense policies established. "National security" should no longer justify bankrupt policies and conceal misdeeds. American and Soviet citizens are just beginning to reassess their countries' genuine defense needs, a prerequisite for drastic reductions in military spending and the reallocation of resources. People must work more vigorously to demilitarize their societies and effectively address fundamental issues of poverty, hunger, and environmental damage.

The transition into the post-Cold War era will not be painless. Along with the joy and promise, the demise of the old order, as witnessed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, can unleash previously suppressed ethnic and religious rivalries. The quest throughout the world for economic structures that avoid the unjust extremes of monopoly communism and laissez-faire capitalism will produce instability and conflict. That this is now less likely to trigger global war offers no solace to the victims.

The difficulties in creating a better world should not be underestimated, but we believe that the overall trend is positive. We are encouraged, for example, by the impressive United Nations efforts to resolve international conflicts in Namibia, Iran and Iraq, and elsewhere. The actual dismantling of U.S. and Soviet intermediate-range ballistic missiles under the INF Treaty and the unilateral Soviet withdrawals of thousands of tanks and troops from central Europe are significant deeds.

Much remains to be done before the greatest short-term threat to the planet—the risk of nuclear war—is eliminated. Additional concrete actions that disarm the relations among nations are needed before the hands of the clock can be turned back further. Still, the termination of the Cold War has lifted a grim weight from the human psyche. It has returned to humanity its hope for a future, and the chance to create one. ■