

## DID THE HANDS OF THE DOOMSDAY CLOCK JUST TICK A BIT CLOSER TO MIDNIGHT?

Written by John Hallam  
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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT  
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

DID THE HANDS OF THE DOOMSDAY CLOCK JUST TICK A BIT CLOSER TO MIDNIGHT?  
(AND IS THE US AMBASSADOR TO NATO STARK STARING BONKERS?)

As if, at 2 minutes to metaphorical 'midnight', where 'midnight' represents the possible end of civilization and maybe of humans as a species, one would have thought that diplomats, especially representatives of powers that have a number of thousands of nuclear warheads would avoid inflammatory language – especially language that, if enough things go wrong, could set in motion an event sequence that might lead to the launch of a number of thousands of US and Russian nuclear warheads.

For a number of years now, Russia has been accused of developing a cruise missile whose range puts it in a category that is banned under the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, negotiated between Reagan and Gorbachev in the 1980s.

If that is really so, then it is indeed, an unfortunate and negative development that takes us into a more dangerous world. In and of itself, it is not actually the end of the world, but it could be one more factor that made the end of the world – and in particular the end of Europe – a little closer.

It would however be more than a bit unfortunate if in our eagerness to avoid the end of the world we instead bought it closer – especially if my favorite analyst, 'Blind Freddie', could tell us that this will be the inevitable result of what we do.

In other words, aggressive and threatening language will get us precisely nowhere, or rather will get us nowhere that any rational person wants to go to.

The Russians insist that they are not in fact in violation of the INF. Its customary to sneer at Russian claims, but the only serious analysis I have ever seen of the system in question makes it a lot more ambiguous than 'clearly in violation', more like 'could maybe be interpreted as being in violation of you really wanted to be bloody-minded'.

According to this analysis, the system in question may once have been tested at a forbidden range, but is not primarily designed for operation at that range.

This is a whole lot more dubious than 'clearly in violation' of the INF.

And the Russians in turn argue that certain US cruise missile and drone systems also violate the INF.

As soon as you honestly try to figure out who, if anyone, is really in violation of the INF it gets tangled, ambiguous, and messy. It is emphatically NOT the case that Russia is 'clearly' in

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violation of the INF. They might, possibly, under some interpretations, be argued to be in violation. Maybe.

Now back to the ambassador to NATO, who seems to have said that the US would try to 'take out' non-INF-compliant systems if they were deployed.

In other words, that there would be a 'pre-emptive strike'.

In a comment in Twitter she later tried to walk that back, saying she did NOT mean a US/NATO pre-emptive strike on Russian tactical nuclear forces, presumably in Kaliningrad.

Such a strike would likely be ineffective. If Russia had any inkling something like that were being seriously contemplated they would initiate a 'pre-pre-emptive strike' (IE fire first, pre-empting the pre-emptive strike), or if they failed to do so they'd use other forces of which they have a vast number, to initiate massive nuclear weapons use, thereby ending civilization and possibly humans as a species.

Fortunately for the continued existence of the biosphere and of humans they have chosen to say that the ambassadors remarks 'cannot be taken seriously'.

However, assuming that these ill-judged remarks do NOT lead to the apocalypse (check back in a week or so if you are still here, just to be sure), they also:

--Do NOTHING to solve the INF violation problem if there is one, which is doubtful. Indeed they make it more likely that Russia will in fact withdraw from the INF, and go ahead and really develop intermediate range nuclear missile systems, or deploy and operate those they have now in INF-violative configurations.

--Make nuclear strategists in Russia much much more jumpy, and much more likely to opt for a pre-pre-emptive strike on the grounds that the US plans a pre-emptive strike.

Which makes an apocalypse down the road more likely than it is even now.

Let's all have a chorus of Tom Lehrers classic 'we will all go together when we go'.

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