

Doomsday Clock - Closer to Midnight?

Written by John Hallam

Monday, 09 January 2012 16:02 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 22:31

SUNDAY 8JAN 2012

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT NUCLEAR FLASHPOINTS PROJECT

MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVEN THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS...OR THE CRICKET..

DOOMSDAY CLOCK ANNOUNCEMENT 10 JAN
ARE WE CLOSER TO NUCLEAR MIDNIGHT?

Arguably FAR more important than either the global financial/economic crisis or even the India-Australia cricket test match, is an announcement that will in all likelihood be confined to the inner pages of newspapers and will probably be completely unnoticed by most people.

On the 9th and 10th of January, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists will hold a symposium and announce whether or not and how far, its team of nobels and highly distinguished policymakers – including a former chief of US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) and a former UN Under-Secretary-General – will move the hands of the 'Doomsday Clock'. (announcement at 1pm10Jan Washington time details appended – only from the Bulletin.).

The position of the hands of the 'doomsday clock' are a rough measure of how far the human species is from self-destruction, primarily as a result of nuclear weapons use. (The Bulletin now increasingly takes on board global warming, biowarfare, nanotech and other issues) As such, while they are not to be taken literally, the clock hands are of – literally – apocalyptic significance.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, under whose auspices the Doomsday clock hand is moved (or not, as the case may be) have given no hint of whether or which way the hands will be moved. The planet will be in suspense until 1pm 10Jan Washington time.

The Doomsday Clock hands now stand at six minutes to midnight, 'midnight' being the complete destruction of civilization and most living things.

The closest the hands have come to midnight is 2 minutes, early in the Cold War. Prior to 10

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Jan 2010 they were at 5 minutes to midnight.

There are a number of good arguments for moving the clock hands closer to midnight, either to five minutes or arguably to four and a half minutes, to midnight.

--In spite of repeated resolutions passed by massive – indeed, overwhelming – majorities in the UN General Assembly and in spite of electoral commitments to do so, the US and Russia have not even tried to negotiate to lower the operational readiness of the thousands of nuclear weapons that each persists in maintaining of high alert. This means that, in a literal sense, the apocalypse remains on the agenda. It remains entirely possible for a combination of computer error and miscalculation to end civilisation and much else.

--Missile Defense now threatens to completely de-rail the entire US-Russia nuclear disarmament agenda. In the most recent development, Russia has warned that it will target NATO missile defense installations in eastern Europe. A strike, especially a nuclear strike, against NATO defense installations would have incalculable consequences. Missile defence has been characterised as a technology that can never work, deployed against a threat that does not exist, that -potentially- can destroy the possibility of global nuclear disarmament.

--The US now spends, in constant dollar terms (ie corrected for inflation) more than it has ever spent in history on nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons-related infrastructure. Russia, China, France, and the UK are all engaged in force modernisation though their expenditures are a tiny fraction of the US nuclear budget .

--There is growing talk about possible strikes by either Israel or the US against Iran, with a possible nuclear component.

--The North Korean nuclear issue remains unsettled, and there is talk of the DPRK conducting a 3rd nuclear test.

--There is a continuing possibility, recently somewhat mitigated by modest confidence building measures, of an India-Pakistan nuclear exchange. Pakistan has the worlds fastest growing nuclear arsenal. Deep concerns have been expressed over the possibility that terrorists could gain access to a Pakistani weapon.

An India-Pakistan nuclear exchange, involving as little as 0.3% of global nuclear arsenals, according to peer-reviewed climatic simulations, would have catastrophic global climatic consequences, equivalent to the 'year with no summer' of 1815.

A US-Russia nuclear exchange could still arguably, destroy what we call 'civilization', and return the world to temperatures not seen since the last ice-age.

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The nobels and retired missile force commanders of the Bulletin will announce on Tuesday Washington time, whether they think the world is safer, or less safe, than it was last time the clock hands were moved in Jan2010.

PND thinks the hands need to be moved just a fateful minute and a half closer to midnight.

Whatever the Bulletin picks, the world really should be watching an awful lot more closely than it probably will be.

John Hallam
People for Nuclear Disarmament Nuclear Flashpoints
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For all particulars relating to the doomsday clock announcement itself please contact the Bulletin of the Atomic scientists as per the details reproduced below, cut and pasted from the Bulletin announcement:

Doomsday Clock announcement to follow international symposium in Washington, DC

<http://thebulletin.org/content/media-center/announcements/2012/01/04/doomsday-clock-announcement-to-follow-international-sy>

4 JANUARY 2012

WASHINGTON, DC – NEWS ADVISORY – The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists(BAS) will announce whether or not it is moving the minute hand of its famous “Doomsday Clock” at 1 p.m. EST/1800 GMT on January 10, 2012 in Washington, DC. The Doomsday Clock announcement will follow year-long deliberations culminating in the 3rd Annual Doomsday Clock Symposium on January 9, 2012.

The last time the Doomsday Clock minute hand moved was in January 2010, when the Clock's minute hand was pushed back one minute from five to six minutes before midnight.

News event speakers will include:

- * Allison Macfarlane, chair, BAS Science and Security Board, member, Blue Ribbon Commission on American's Nuclear Future, and associate professor, George Mason University;
- * Lawrence Krauss, co-chair, BAS Board of Sponsors, foundation professor, School of Earth and Space Exploration and Physics departments, associate director, Beyond Center, co-director, Cosmology Initiative, and director, New Origins Initiative, Arizona State University;
- * Robert Socolow, member, Science and Security Board, professor, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering,

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and co-principal investigator, Carbon Mitigation Initiative, Princeton University;

* Jayantha Dhanapala, member, BAS Board of Sponsors, former United Nations under-secretary-general for Disarmament Affairs (1998-2003), and ambassador of Sri Lanka to the United States (1995-7); and

* Kennette Benedict, executive director, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

The January 10, 2012 Doomsday Clock announcement at the Advancement of Science (AAAS) auditorium will follow an international symposium to be held on January 9, 2012 at the Jones Day law firm, 51 Louisiana Ave NW, Washington, DC. The Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, with participation from the Sponsors, will review the implications of recent events and trends for the future of humanity with input from other experts on nuclear weapons, nuclear energy, climate change, and biosecurity.

Questions to be addressed on January 9th will include: what is the future of nuclear power after Fukushima?; how are nuclear weapons to be managed in a world of increasing economic, political, and environmental volatility?; what are the links among climate change, resource scarcity, conflict, and nuclear weapons?; and what is required for robust implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention? Click here for the full program for the January 9th symposium.

TO PARTICIPATE IN PERSON: You can attend the Doomsday Clock news event on January 10, 2012, 1 p.m. EST/1800 GMT at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) auditorium, 1200 New York Avenue, Washington, DC. Attendance will be limited to credentialed members of the news media. For security reasons, all attendees must RSVP in advance by contacting Patrick Mitchell, (703) 276-3266, pmitchell@hastingsgroup.com.

CAN'T PARTICIPATE IN PERSON?:

Reporters in the US who are unable to attend the live news event in person can listen to the proceedings over a live, phone-based, one-way phone feed on January 10, 2012 at 1 p.m. EST/1800 GMT by dialing 1 (800) 860-2442.

Toll free lines are available for callers in the UK, France, Germany and Japan. Callers in the UK may use 080 823 890 64.

Callers in Germany may use 0800 664 7650.

Callers in France may use 0805 1022 07.

Callers in Japan may use 0066 33 1330 94.

Reporters from other countries may use 412-858-4600 to connect to the live news event. Callers should ask to be connected to the "2012 BAS Doomsday Clock" news event. No questions will be taken over the one-way phone

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feed. A streaming audio recording of the news event will be available later on January 10, 2012 at <http://www.thebulletin.org> .

CONTACT:

Patrick Mitchell, (703) 276-3266, or
pmitchell@hastingsgroup.com.

Founded in 1945 by University of Chicago scientists who had helped develop the first atomic weapons in the Manhattan Project, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists subsequently created the Doomsday Clock in 1947 using the imagery of apocalypse (midnight) and the contemporary idiom of nuclear explosion (countdown to zero), to convey threats to humanity and the planet. The decision to move the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock is made by the Bulletin's Board of Directors in consultation with its Board of Sponsors, which includes 18 Nobel Laureates. The Clock has become a universally recognized indicator of the world's vulnerability to catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, and emerging technologies in the life sciences.

<http://thebulletin.org/content/media-center/announcements/2011/12/19/3rd-annual-doomsday-clock-symposium-january-9-2012>

3rd Annual Doomsday Clock Symposium, January 9, 2012
19 DECEMBER 2011

The Science and Security Board and the Governing Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, with participation from the Sponsors, will consider the implications of recent events and trends for the future of humanity at the annual Doomsday Clock Symposium.

- * What is the future of nuclear power after Fukushima?
- * How are nuclear weapons to be managed in a world of increasing economic, political, and environmental volatility?
- * What are the links among climate change, resource scarcity, conflict, and nuclear weapons?
- * What is required for robust implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention?

10:00-11:15 am Nuclear weapons and prospects for disarmament

As implementation of New START proceeds, what steps should be taken next to ensure continued reductions in nuclear arsenals?

What are the obstacles to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons?

Panelists: Amb. Thomas Pickering, * International Crisis Group

Ret. Gen. Eugene Habiger, University of Georgia

Janne Nolan, American Security Project

Moderator: Steven Miller, Harvard University

11:30-12:45 pm Civilian nuclear power after Fukushima

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How can societies and communities meet energy needs with least risk to health and safety and the greatest payoff for economic development?

How much risk are people willing to accept to their lives and communities for energy development?

How do we make decisions for the common good about energy technology development? And who should be involved?

Are we locked into the current energy development path? Are there alternatives that involve less risk to safety, health, and community?

Panelists: Robert Rosner,* University of Chicago

Allison Macfarlane,* George Mason University

George Apostolakis, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Moderator: Mark Hibbs, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

12:45-1:30 pm Luncheon

Speaker: Stanford Ovshinsky, Ovshinsky Innovations LLC

Introduced by: Thomas Rosenbaum,* University of Chicago

1:45-3:00 pm Climate emergency and public policy

How should we be thinking about the trade-offs between current injury and disruption from energy technologies-whether from fossil fuel, solar, nuclear, wind or any other- and future injury and disruption from climate change?

What was achieved at the UN conference at Durban in December 2011?

Panelists: James Hansen,* NASA

Susan Solomon, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Moderator: Steve Cohen, Columbia University

3:15-4:30 pm Biosecurity and government regulation

What was achieved at the Biological Weapons Convention meeting in December?

Are biological research facilities, adequately regulated to prevent releases of potentially harmful and novel biological agents?

Panelists: Kathleen Vogel, Cornell University

Marie Chevrier, Rutgers University, Camden

Moderator: Gerald Epstein, American Association for the Advancement of Science

4:30-5:00 Concluding remarks

Speaker: Robert Socolow,* Princeton University

5:30 pm Reception

Remarks: Lawrence Krauss, Arizona State University, Chair-Board of Sponsors

6:00-8:30 pm Dinner

Featured Speaker: Elaine Scarry, Harvard University

Introduced by: Jayantha Dhanapala, Board of Sponsors

Moderator: Kennette Benedict, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

Location: Jones Day

51 Louisiana Ave NW | Washington, D.C.

(by Invitation Only)

*Science and Security Board Member

Program PDF of the 3rd Annual Doomsday Clock Symposium