

# Doomsday Clock: New Weapons Raise Danger of Nuclear War

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In 1945, United States scientists who worked on the first nuclear weapons (two were used against Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki) set up an organization to print *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, which warned of the dangers of nuclear weapons. As the Soviet Union began to develop such weapons in response, the *Bulletin* began to feature a Doomsday Clock, which set 12 midnight as doomsday, and a minute hand that signaled in a graphic way the danger of nuclear annihilation by how close it was to midnight.

Over the decades the minute hand has moved closer or further away from midnight as the situation of the world changed.

Recently, it has moved to one minute and 40 seconds, the closest ever. The *Bulletin* explained that there were now two main dangers. One was the increased likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons due to technological advances, if one could use that word to describe such a negative development. The other was the danger of massive destruction due to climate change.

This article will discuss the first increased danger.

The Obama administration, with bipartisan approval, set aside 10 trillion dollars over ten years to “modernize” the American nuclear arsenal. This set off a renewal of the nuclear arms race with the other major nuclear power, Russia. This has now been accelerated by the withdrawal of the U.S. from talks with Russia to establish a new nuclear equilibrium.

Of course, exactly what “modernization” has been underway is secret. One aspect that has become known is the development of supersonic ICBMs that would be harder for defenses to destroy, as well as reduce the time from launch to reaching the target.

The danger of accidental launching of atomic missiles would be increased, as it may mistakenly appear on radar, etc. that missiles that are harder to destroy were quickly approaching, as well as reducing the time to verify whether the apparent attack was real or not, and an accidental retaliatory attack could be ordered.

Another result of the “modernization” of the nuclear arsenal: The Federation of American Scientists revealed in late January that the U.S. Navy had deployed in the Atlantic a submarine armed with a low-yield Trident nuclear warhead.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons said this was “an alarming development that heightens the risk of nuclear war.” The Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Adam Smith, said “This destabilizing deployment further increases the potential for miscalculation during a crisis.”

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov responded, “This reflects the fact that the United States is actually lowering the nuclear threshold and that they are conceding the possibility of them

waging a limited nuclear war and winning this war.”

This news has been only scantily covered in the mainstream press. What follows is taken from an interview with William Arkin, who co-authored the Federation of American Scientists article, on the independent news program Democracy Now.

The now deployed warhead is about as powerful as one-third of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. “Here we have a weapon which is intended explicitly to be more useable,” Atkins noted.

“Low yield” is somewhat of a misnomer. The bomb would obliterate something like 20 square city blocks and release large amounts of radiation. The U.S. has about 50 such weapons, ready to be deployed.

Russia also has low-yield warheads aimed at Europe, and its own supersonic missiles aimed at the U.S., so it is unlikely that the submarine-launched missile would be aimed at Russia. “What this weapon is about is having a more useable weapon against countries like Iran and North Korea... a preemptive use [to win a war] or to destroy a very important target....”, Atkins said.

A submarine could get close to a target country, reducing the time from launch to explosion to “15 minutes or less,” Atkins noted, “and with an assured capability – that is, a missile that’s able to penetrate any enemy air defenses.”

Given the bi-partisan stance that Iran must not be able to have a nuclear weapon (while Israel has many of them), it is not ruled out that the U.S. would use such a bomb to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities even if Iran isn’t on the verge of a nuclear weapon. How is Iran likely to respond? We got an indication recently when Iran retaliated against Trump’s assassination of one of its top generals by using its accurate missiles with conventional warheads against U.S. forces in Iraq.

Iranian missiles can reach all U.S. bases in the region, as well as the U.S.’s client, Israel. There would likely be a wider war in response with the potential for the use of more powerful nuclear bombs.

What would Russia do with such a situation developing at its borders?

A similar scenario could be imagined regarding North Korea, which does have missiles with nuclear warheads. Would a U.S. strike with low-yield weapons be assured to destroy all of North Korea’s missiles? North Korea would likely strike with nuclear warheads U.S. bases in South Korea and in the Pacific.

What would China do with a nuclear exchange on its borders?

The point of raising such possibilities is not to say they are likely, but to indicate the real danger that the use of any atomic weapons would be greatly destabilizing, and could result in the Doomsday Clock reaching midnight for humanity.

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