

A moment of historic danger: It is *still* 90 seconds to midnight

From: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

Ominous trends continue to point the world toward global catastrophe. The war in Ukraine and the widespread and growing reliance on nuclear weapons increase the risk of nuclear escalation. China, Russia, and the United States are all spending huge sums to expand or modernize their nuclear arsenals, adding to the ever-present danger of nuclear war through mistake or miscalculation.

In 2023, Earth experienced its hottest year on record, and massive floods, wildfires, and other climate-related disasters affected millions of people around the world. Meanwhile, rapid and worrisome developments in the life sciences and other disruptive technologies accelerated, while governments made only feeble efforts to control them.

The members of the Science and Security Board have been deeply worried about the deteriorating state of the world. That is why we set the Doomsday Clock at two minutes to midnight in 2019 and at 100 seconds to midnight in 2022. Last year, we expressed our heightened concern by moving the Clock to 90 seconds to midnight—the closest to global catastrophe it has ever been—in large part because of Russian threats to use nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine.

Today, we once again set the Doomsday Clock at 90 seconds to midnight because humanity continues to face an unprecedented level of danger. Our decision should not be taken as a sign that the international security situation has eased. Instead, leaders and citizens around the world should take this statement as a stark warning and respond urgently, as if today were the most dangerous moment in modern history. Because it may well be.

But the world can be made safer. The Clock can move away from midnight. As we wrote last year, “In this time of unprecedented global danger, concerted action is required, and every second counts.” That is just as true today.

The many dimensions of nuclear threat

A durable end to Russia’s war in Ukraine seems distant, and the use of nuclear weapons by Russia in that conflict remains a serious possibility. In February 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his decision to “suspend” the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). (Continued next column)

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In March, he announced the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. In June, Sergei Karaganov, an advisor to Putin, urged Moscow to consider launching limited nuclear strikes on Western Europe as a way to bring the war in Ukraine to a favorable conclusion. In October, Russia’s Duma voted to withdraw Moscow’s ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, as the US Senate continued to refuse even to debate ratification.

Nuclear spending programs in the three largest nuclear powers—China, Russia, and the United States—threaten to trigger a three-way nuclear arms race as the world’s arms control architecture collapses. Russia and China are expanding their nuclear capabilities, and pressure mounts in Washington for the United States to respond in kind.

Meanwhile, other potential nuclear crises fester. Iran continues to enrich uranium to close to weapons grade while stonewalling the International Atomic Energy Agency on key issues. Efforts to reinstate an Iran nuclear deal appear unlikely to succeed, and North Korea continues building nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. Nuclear expansion in Pakistan and India continues without pause or restraint.

And the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas has the potential to escalate into a wider Middle Eastern conflict that could pose unpredictable threats, regionally and globally.

An ominous climate change outlook

The world in 2023 entered uncharted territory as it suffered its hottest year on record and global greenhouse gas emissions continued to rise. Both global and North Atlantic sea-surface temperatures broke records, and Antarctic sea ice reached its lowest daily extent since the advent of satellite data. The world already risks exceeding a goal of the Paris climate agreement—a temperature increase of no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—because of insufficient commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and insufficient implementation of commitments already made. To halt further warming, the world must achieve net zero carbon dioxide emissions.

The world invested a record-breaking \$1.7 trillion in clean energy in 2023, and countries representing half the world’s gross domestic product pledged to triple their renewable energy capacity by 2030.

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Offsetting this, however, were fossil fuel investments of nearly \$1 trillion. In short, current efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are grossly insufficient to avoid dangerous human and economic impacts from climate change, which disproportionately affect the poorest people in the world. Barring a marked increase in efforts, the toll of human suffering from climate disruption will inexorably mount.

Evolving biological threats

The revolution in life sciences and associated technologies continued to expand in scope last year, including, especially, the increased sophistication and efficiency of genetic engineering technologies. We highlight one issue of special concern: The convergence of emerging artificial intelligence tools and biological technologies may radically empower individuals to misuse biology.

In October, US President Joe Biden signed an executive order on “safe, secure, and trustworthy AI” that calls for protection “against the risks of using AI to engineer dangerous biological materials by developing strong new standards for biological synthesis screening.” Though a useful step, the order is not legally binding. The concern is that large language models enable individuals who otherwise lack sufficient know-how to identify, acquire, and deploy biological agents that would harm large numbers of humans, animals, plants, and other elements of the environment. Reinvigorated efforts this past year in the United States to revise and strengthen oversight of risky life science research are useful, but much more is needed.

The dangers of AI

One of the most significant technological developments in the last year involved the dramatic advance of generative artificial intelligence. The apparent sophistication of chatbots based on large language models, such as ChatGPT, led some respected experts to express concern about existential risks arising from further rapid advancements in the field. But others argue that claims about existential risk distract from the real and immediate threats that AI poses today (see, for example, “Evolving biological threats” above). Regardless, AI is a paradigmatic disruptive technology; recent efforts at global governance of AI should be expanded.

AI has great potential to magnify disinformation and corrupt the information environment on which democracy depends. AI-enabled disinformation efforts could be a factor that prevents the world from dealing effectively with nuclear risks, pandemics, and climate change.

Military uses of AI are accelerating. Extensive use of AI is already occurring in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, simulation, and training. Of particular concern are lethal autonomous weapons, which identify and destroy targets without human intervention.

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Decisions to put AI in control of important physical systems—in particular, nuclear weapons—could indeed pose a direct existential threat to humanity.

Fortunately, many countries are recognizing the importance of regulating AI and are beginning to take steps to reduce the potential for harm. These initial steps include a proposed regulatory framework by the European Union, an executive order by President Biden, an international declaration to address AI risks, and the formation of a new UN advisory body. But these are only tiny steps; much more must be done to institute effective rules and norms, despite the daunting challenges involved in governing artificial intelligence.

How to turn back the Clock

Everyone on Earth has an interest in reducing the likelihood of global catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, advances in the life sciences, disruptive technologies, and the widespread corruption of the world’s information ecosystem. These threats, singularly and as they interact, are of such a character and magnitude that no one nation or leader can bring them under control. That is the task of leaders and nations working together in the shared belief that common threats demand common action. As the first step, and despite their profound disagreements, three of the world’s leading powers—the United States, China, and Russia—should commence serious dialogue about each of the global threats outlined here. At the highest levels, these three countries need to take responsibility for the existential danger the world now faces. They have the capacity to pull the world back from the brink of catastrophe. They should do so, with clarity and courage, and without delay.

Its 90 seconds to midnight.

Nuclear Peace Age Peace Foundation

Invitation to 3rd Anniversary of TPNW To join us virtually, please register here: <https://bit.ly/48xFkX5>. Jan. 29th @ 1:30 pm New York time.

We are excited to invite you to a celebration of the third anniversary of the historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and our youth initiative Reverse the Trend: Save Our Planet, Save Our People.

The event will take place at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations and be offered virtually for attendees from around the world. Speakers will include diplomats, scholars, and a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for the TPNW. Kazakhstan holds the presidency of the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which will be held in March 2025.

More info: Bulletin of Atomic Scientists--Nuclear deterrence is the existential threat, not the nuclear ban treaty.

To join us virtually, please register here: <https://bit.ly/48xFkX5>.

Our Mission

The Boundary Peace Initiative represents people of diverse backgrounds officially brought together in 2002 because of our mutual concern for the rise in world conflict. Our mandate is to participate in multilateral non-violent conflict resolution in support of global human rights, ecological and environmental sustainability and international law through education, sharing of information, dialogue and activism locally and globally. We encourage and seek your participation in our mutual work for true peace based on social justice, equality, accountability, integrity, honour, respect, etc in order to build a better world today and future generations.

BPI web site: www.boundarypeaceinitiative.org
For info contact Laura at (250) 444-0524 or (250) 442-0434 or email: L4peace@telus.net.

UN International Days

- Feb. 1-7: World Interfaith Harmony Week
- Feb. 4: International Day of Human Fraternity
- Feb. 6: International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation
- Feb. 11: International Day of Women and Girls in Science
- Feb. 12: International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when conducive to Terrorism
- Feb. 17: Global Tourism Resilience Day
- Feb. 20: World Day of Social Justice
- Feb. 21: International Mother Language Day

The Elders call for immediate compliance by Israel with ICJ provisional measures

Statement: The Elders call for Israel to comply immediately with the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to protect Palestinians in Gaza from acts of genocide.

The Elders also call for Israel's allies to publicly affirm their respect for the Court's ruling, and to use the political, military and financial leverage at their disposal to ensure Israel's compliance with the provisional measures.

The ICJ's legally binding decision is a moment of the utmost gravity. Israeli forces have killed over 25,000 Palestinians in Gaza, destroyed homes and infrastructure across the territory and displaced up to 1.9 million people. The Elders share the Court's judgement that this scale of devastation risks causing irreparable harm to the people of Gaza.

Israel, as the occupying military power, must comply with the Court's ruling and implement the provisional measures in full. This includes ensuring its military does not commit any acts of genocide against the Palestinian people as a protected group, including killing members of the group. It also includes preventing incitement to genocide, and enabling provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance. An immediate step must be to lift the siege of Gaza and end the collective punishment of Palestinians.

The Elders support the Court's emphasis that all parties to the conflict are bound by international humanitarian law, and its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages held by Hamas and other armed groups.

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ICJ suspects Israel is committing genocide

From: Just Peace Advocates & Canadian Foreign Policy Institute (January 26, 2024)

Breaking. The International Court of Justice has concluded that Israel may be violating the 1948 Genocide Convention. The ICJ has agreed that South Africa's case is strong enough to move forward and has delivered a provisional ruling that Israel must curtail its genocidal policies in Gaza.

A blow to Israel's genocidal campaign, the World Court's decision puts the pro-Israel Trudeau government in a bind. While the Liberals profess their commitment to the "international rules-based order", they are unlikely to uphold their responsibilities under the Genocide Convention without significant pressure.

To ensure Canada is not enabling genocide, Just Peace Advocates with the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute is demanding Trudeau immediately suspend direct Canadian assistance to the Israeli military.

Take a minute to email Trudeau and other MPs to demand Canada:

- Suspend permits for arms sales to Israel
- Pause bilateral military ties
- Revoke the charitable status of charities violating Canada Revenue Agency rules by assisting the Israeli military
- Announce an investigation into Canadians fighting in Gaza
- Condemn Israel's genocide.

To add to the mounting pressure, today at 12:30pm EST Just Peace Advocates and the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute will host an online press event with South Africa's High Commissioner, the Palestinian Authority's representative, the director of Human Right Watch Canada, Avi Lewis and Michael Lynk.

Ed. Note: *although the date has passed for the online press event you can still email the Prime Minister by going to:* www.justpeaceadvocates.ca

(From last column) The Elders

All states have a responsibility to respect the Court's ruling. South Africa has shown moral leadership in bringing this case, and it is now incumbent on others – particularly Israel's allies and the UN Security Council – to live up to their own moral and legal obligations to prevent acts of genocide, and support the ICJ's ruling.

As a minimum, Israel's allies must ensure they are not complicit in any atrocity crimes. The Elders thus reiterate their call for all countries providing military assistance to Israel to place this under review and set new conditions for future provision. Governments which provide military assistance in the knowledge that atrocities are being committed, or may be imminent, risk being complicit. Self-defence can never be a justification for atrocity crimes.

For too long, Israel's allies – particularly the United States and many European states – have provided political cover for its violations of international law. This impunity must end now.

Political leaders who choose to disregard or undermine the Court's ruling risk further weakening the international rule of law at a time when it is already acutely under threat. The UN Security Council has a vital role in ensuring compliance with the ICJ ruling and upholding the consistent application of international law. The world is watching.

Editor's note: *Check out the elders at:* www.thelders.org

WHAT'S UP?

March 23rd @ Holy Trinity Anglican Church 7th Street Grand Forks, B.C. from **9 am – 4pm**
Conference on Palestine-Israel hosted by the Boundary Peace Initiative. Info next column.

April 20th third in a series of **peace gatherings** hosted by a Grand Forks collective of concerned groups. Watch for details.

A New Petition calling for an Immediate and Permanent Ceasefire in Palestine/Israel will be circulated, so watch for it.

A new **Podcast** endorsed by the BPI on YouTube on current issues:

https://youtu.be/25rDHO5Se80?si=mhY_aJTiTTtQdf

Voice your opinion to the Prime Minister and all MPs. Free postage: {Name of MP}, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

Go to the Government of Canada website for MP email and phone contact at: <http://www.canada.gc.ca>

The BPI welcomes your input. Articles may not be common consensus of members. To submit articles contact Laura at **250-444-0524 or 250-442-0434** or email **L4peace@telus.net**.

The BPI is an affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Peace Pledge Union, Abolition 2000, CNANW and works with various local and global peace, social justice and environmental groups such as Jewish Voices for Peace.

Together We Learn--Palestine/Israel Conference

By: Laura Savinkoff Coordinator BPI

Mark this date for things to do—March 23, 2024!

The Boundary Peace Initiative invites you to join us from 9 am to 4 pm at Holy Trinity Anglican Church on 7th Street, Grand Forks. We are hosting a conference to learn about Palestine and Israel from five knowledgeable people with lived-experience. Registration begins at 9 am and the conference at 9:30 am. Admission is by donation. There will be all day snacks and Borscht for lunch.

After the 2019 Peace In, Peace Out! 24-hour variety show, we promised that the funds raised would go towards hosting conferences on various aspects of the work we are mandated to do. Our mission statement includes the need for education and sharing of information. We have been fulfilling our promise.

Our 2020 plans fell through because of Covid, but in June 2023 we were fortunate to host Tamara Lorencz from London, Ontario and Graham Watt from Grand Forks to explore how Military Activities affect Climate Change. Then in September we hosted three immigrants living in the Kootenays for a successful learning experience about Iran, why they left and what the situation is at present. We also learned of their experiences in Canada as Muslims.

On Saturday, March 23rd, we have an impressive depth of experience and knowledge on the historical aspects of Palestine and the creation of Israel; their lived experiences in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel; and their experience in Canada. Coming to share their thoughts, understanding and knowledge is a Jewish/Quaker woman activist and author Maxine Kaufman-Lacousta who is a member of Independent Jewish Voices for Peace; a Jewish man Sid Sniad a labour, anti-racist, peace and social justice activist, founder of Stop War Vancouver and a member of the Independent Jewish Voices for Peace; Rahai Ghattas a Palestinian Christian from Vernon; Susan Ghattas a representative of the Canadian Boat to Gaza from Vernon; Adam Hamdan a Muslim Palestinian from Christina Lake.

Let's show our guests that the Boundary is willing to learn and add to our understanding beyond media reports on the past and current situation in Palestine--Israel. Let's welcome our guests with open hearts, minds and spirits. We will have the opportunity to ask questions, make comments and add to our knowledge base. We will ensure there is time to brainstorm as to what we can do locally to stop the killing so that all children are able to grow to adulthood and live in harmony and peace at home and around the world.

Plan to join us March 23rd at 9 am at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Grand Forks, B.C.

Wisdom is limitless, and the closer you approach it, the more important it becomes for your life. A person can always improve himself.

Leo Tolstoy