

**Message from Noam Chomsky to the delegates to the annual Global Network
Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space 26th Conference
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Last January, the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientist was moved forward to two minutes to midnight, the closest it has been to terminal disaster since the Clock was first set in 1947, at the dawn of the nuclear age. The first setting was seven minutes to midnight, halcyon days by current standards. The only previous setting at two minutes to midnight was in 1953, when the US and then the USSR exploded thermonuclear weapons, demonstrating that human intelligence, in its glory, had devised the means to destroy us all, and much of the rest of life as well.

The shocking record of the nuclear age yields two crucial conclusions. First, it is a near miracle that have survived thus far, having approached perilously close to disaster many times, frequently by accident, sometimes by reckless acts of leaders. We cannot expect that miracles will persist. The second lesson is that at each point, the escalation of the race to terminal disaster could have been stopped by sane decisions, impelled by an informed and engaged public. To mention only one ominous current example, the eastward expansion of NATO after the collapse of the USSR, in violation of commitments to Mikhail Gorbachev, has fulfilled the warnings of George Kennan and other senior statesmen that this “policy error of historic proportions” would lead to rising and very dangerous tensions on the Russian border, tensions that could explode at any moment. There have been many prior cases.

The Obama-Trump program of modernization of nuclear weapons has already proceeded so far, according to an expert study, that it “creates exactly what one would expect to see, if a nuclear-armed state were planning to have the capacity to fight and win a nuclear war by disarming enemies with a surprise first strike.” Trump’s recent Nuclear Strategy Review lowers the threshold for nuclear attack and calls for new and dangerous weapons. Russia is also modernizing its forces, and there are serious danger points elsewhere.

The next step in the race to terminal destruction is the nuclear weaponization and militarization of space, an extremely hazardous initiative, another “policy error of historic proportions.” As throughout the nuclear age, the US is in the lead, this time under a leadership that openly seeks to dominate by force. As before, others will surely follow, narrowing further the already much too slim prospects for survival.

As always before, sane decisions can avert this tragedy. And once again, the actions of an informed and engaged public can be a powerful force to shift policy dramatically from race to destruction to ending the nuclear age before it ends all of us.

~ Noam Chomsky