

Don't Let the Crisis in Ukraine Damage Decades of Progress on Nuclear Cooperation

By General Norton A. Schwartz and Stanley A. Weiss

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WASHINGTON AND GSTAAD--This December, the world will witness the 70th anniversary of a publication best known for tracking the end of the world. Founded in 1945 by veterans of the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* was launched in the wake of the devastating nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the goal of informing the public about nuclear policy. But since 1947, it has been known largely for a metaphorical device it introduced in June of that year: the Doomsday Clock, which measures how close humanity is to extinction.

Launched at seven minutes to midnight, the clock hit two minutes after the first hydrogen bomb was tested in 1953; jumped back to 12 after the United States and the Soviet Union backed away from nuclear confrontation over Cuba in 1962; moved to three minutes at the height of Ronald Reagan-era U.S.-Soviet tensions in 1984; and widened to 17 minutes in 1991, after the Berlin Wall fell and both sides began cutting their nuclear arsenals. While it has moved up and down ever since--based on new threats like climate change and other weapons of mass destruction--it never crossed five again.

That is, until January, when the Doomsday Clock moved back to three minutes to midnight, pushed, once again, by the danger of nuclear confrontation. With Israel threatening Iran over its nuclear program, Pakistan and North Korea building up stockpiles, China sinking billions into nuclear submarines and missile systems, and the White House seeking to modernize America's aging arsenal, the world, as the *Economist* put it, "is entering a new nuclear age." But make no mistake: Even with this burgeoning activity, the greatest threat today is being driven by an increasingly belligerent Russia, which is using its nuclear arsenal as a nationalist rallying cry while posing a dilemma for the U.S.: If Russia is no longer committed to arms reduction, should the U.S. continue to carry the flag for disarmament by itself?

It's hard to imagine, but when the Cold War ended in 1991, there were more than 52,000 nuclear warheads worldwide, about 97 percent of which were owned by the U.S. or the Soviets. That year, the U.S. Senate, led by Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, created the Cooperative

Threat Reduction program, known as Nunn-Lugar. It provided training, technology, and U.S. taxpayer dollars to dismantle and destroy nuclear and chemical weapons in Russia and the former Soviet states while preventing such materials from falling into the wrong hands.

The program has been highly successful, helping Russia and other former Soviet states deactivate more than 7,600 warheads while dismantling more than 2,600 vehicles that deliver nuclear weapons. The *Boston Globe* recently reported that from 2010 to 2012, the program "secretly removed enough highly enriched uranium from Ukraine to make nine nuclear bombs--some of it from parts of the country now wracked by violence and lawlessness."

It is the current crisis in Ukraine, brought on by Russian troops that first invaded the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea and then ignited a border war in eastern Ukraine last year, that has seen nuclear tensions ratchet up, continuing a Russian position that hardened when Vladimir Putin won back the office of President in 2012. That same year, Moscow announced that it would not extend the Nunn-Lugar Agreement, despite its overwhelming success. In 2013, the Kremlin decided to end Russian Defense Ministry involvement in the program entirely. In December 2014, clearly stung by Western sanctions imposed for its aggression in Ukraine, Russia announced the end of all remaining cooperation.

Far from reducing its stockpile, Russia has shifted to using its nuclear arsenal as a tool for intimidation. Close Putin ally Dmitry Kiselev, the head of Russia's main state news agency, who bragged last year that Russia was the only country that could turn America "to ash," told Russian viewers in February that while the Soviet Union "pledged to never use nuclear weapons first ... Russia's current military does not." Political strategist Sergey Markov, reflecting a widely held Russian view, was quoted in the *Telegraph* as saying "In Russia, we believe that Ukraine has been occupied by the U.S ... which is the first step in a war against Russia ... under these circumstances, the threat of nuclear confrontation is very real."

Meanwhile, Moscow has also begun to rebuild and modernize its arsenal, reportedly increasing its defense

budget by more than 50 percent since 2007, a third of which has been spent on nuclear weapons. Its military now routinely carries out mock nuclear attacks on European capitals, and Russia recently staged nuclear exercises in the Arctic. For eight years, it has also reportedly been in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty--signed in 1987 by President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev--by developing cruise missiles with a range prohibited by the treaty. Such nuclear chest beating is finding an audience among Russia's young, who have bought T-shirts with slogans praising Russia's nuclear arsenal at a record clip. It's little wonder that anti-American invective has now reached Stalin-era levels in Russia, as the Washington Post reported this week.

Whether these nuclear taunts are real or are simply meant to placate hardliners in Moscow, the question remains the same: What is Washington to do?

One path was illuminated last month by newly appointed Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, who suggested that America provide a strong response to Russia's violations of the INF Treaty, one that would clearly "make Russia less secure than they are today."

Some members of Congress have gone further, calling for the deployment of tactical nuclear gravity bombs and accompanying short-range aircraft at new sites in Eastern Europe. Others have called for the U.S. to abandon its arms-control efforts altogether and block implementation of a new Strategic Arms Treaty that the U.S. and Russia agreed to in 2011. Last December, Congress took a step in this direction by voting to defund U.S. efforts to secure loose Russian nukes for the first time in a quarter century.

But this is foolhardy. The U.S. and Russia haven't worked hard for two decades to rid the world of nuclear weapons to abandon the effort at the first sign of difficulty. Carter is right to call attention to these violations and to stand firm in pressuring Russia to fulfill its obligations, but the U.S. needs to take a holistic approach to our arms-control agreements with Russia.

What should the U.S. do? Three things.

First, provide needed resources. Russia claims that it is planning to take over the responsibilities of the Nunn-

Lugar program and increase related funding. But given the deteriorating economic situation in Russia, and the fact that there is still much to be done on the dismantling of weapons systems while securing nuclear materials, it is possible that there will be a window for U.S. officials to restart cooperation by offering much-needed resources. The security of these weapons systems and materials is an issue that affects not only Russia but the U.S. and all other countries concerned about the potential for terrorist attacks.

Second, push to get relations back on track. U.S. officials should stand ready to renew dialogue with any component of the Russian government that indicates willingness to work in this area. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Energy should continue to pursue dialogue with Russian state atomic energy firm Rosatom, which, even though it tried to blame the U.S. for deteriorating relations in a January press release, has simultaneously expressed interest in eventually resuming cooperation.

Third, become an evangelist once again for nuclear diplomacy. The U.S. should become a loud voice in defense of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which slows the development of nuclear weapons by discouraging enrichment of uranium, which is at the heart of the negotiations between Washington and Teheran over Iran's nuclear program today.

Nearly 70 years ago, one of the founding godfathers of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists wrote in a fundraising letter, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe." His name was Albert Einstein. It's hard to believe that seven decades later, we are closer to midnight today than we were then. Here's hoping we get our "modes of thinking" back on track.

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