

Doomsday Clock: Five Minutes to Midnight

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" I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita ... "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." '(J. Robert Oppenheimer, 22nd April 1904 – 18th February 1967, Scientific Director of the Manhattan Project, on the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Chilling ironies surely do not come much greater than the Nobel Peace Prize winning President of the United States, in an election year, having contributed to global instability and the possibility of nuclear conflict, to such an extent that the "Doomsday Clock", maintained by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists at the University of Chicago, has this week been moved to five minutes to midnight.

The forward-creeping hands of the symbolic clock, maintained since 1947, two years after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, indicate the closest to global catastrophe in twenty six years, with the exception of 2007, when the hands were similarly set under the gung-ho "Bring 'em on", Presidency of George W. Bush.

What a world away from Obama's June 2009 speech at Egypt's Al Azhar University, where he declared he was in Cairo: *"... to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims round the world (and to) share ... tolerance and dignity..."*

He asserted: *"There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another and to seek common ground ... the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart."*

Tell that to the bereaved, maimed, homeless Libyans, Iraqis, Afghans, the US-menaced people of Syria, over one third of whom are fourteen or under; the annihilation-threatened Iranian population, nearly a quarter also children, fourteen years or under.

Iran, so demonized, yet which generously hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world. (1999 UNHCR figures cite at a cost then, to embargoed Iran, of ten million \$s a day.)

Tell it too, to the droned and blown (away) of Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia.

A: " ... sustained effort to listen ...", has been largely denied the untried, incarcerated, abused, tortured in Bagram and Guantanamo's "gulags of our times", as totally during the Obama Presidency, as the years before.

But back to the ticking Atomic clock. Alarmingly, the furthest from "midnight" it has ever

been is seventeen minutes, in 1991, when the US and then Soviet Union, under George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (31st July.) A heartening seven minute leap from from the ten to midnight of 1990, even that, in spite of the onslaught of thirty two nation war on Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait. The Berlin Wall had, however, fallen and the Cold War seemed to be ending.

In 1963, 1972, both years of seemingly ground breaking arms limitation Treaties between the US and Soviet Union, the clock still stood at ten minutes to midnight.

Even when India tested a nuclear device, and the US and Soviet Union both modernized their destructive potential in 1974, the clock stood four minutes further away from annihilation than Obama's contribution – then at nine minutes to midnight.

As the United States aircraft carriers, Carl Vinson and John C. Stennis, bristling with nuclear and other holocaustal weapons, and twitchy testosterone-fuelled troops, steam Iran-wards, to either bomb nuclear installations – with the danger of a potential nuclear winter – or bomb to keep the Straits of Hormuz open for one fifth of the world' oil supplies – the clock is just two minutes back from when the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb in 1947, officially starting the nuclear arms race.

It is three minutes from the two minutes to midnight – the most apocalyptic ever – of 1953, when both the US and Soviet Union tested thermo-nuclear devices within nine months of each other.

There are about 19,000 nuclear weapons in the world, according to the Science and Security Board.

"That's enough to blow up the Earth many times over. We are really in a pickle", says Kennette Benedict, Executive Director of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, of their latest clock re-set.

"Recognizing our common humanity is only the beginning of our task", said President Obama, in Cairo, when some believed his: "Yes we can", meant peace, and a new dawn for the planet and humanity.

" No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other. It's easier to start wars than to end them. ... It's easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. But we should choose the right path, not just the easy path.

"There's one rule that lies at the heart of every religion – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

"This truth transcends nations and peoples — a belief that isn't new; that isn't black or white or brown; that isn't Christian or Muslim or Jew. It's a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions around the world. It's a faith in other people, and it's what brought me here today", he concluded.

Indeed. Beware of Presidents bearing Nobel Peace Prize tags....

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