

Reckless Path to Nuclear Weapons Leaves Us Looking Over the Edge

The Doomsday Clock is likely to advance again later this January.

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Theme: [History](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

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What heralded the United States as a uniquely dangerous force was its creation of the atomic bomb, the world's first nuclear weapon. Prompting this was Albert Einstein's signing of a letter regarding nuclear research, drafted by his fellow physicists Leo Szilard and Eugene Wigner, then quickly dispatched on 2 August 1939 to president Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The letter detailed a formulation of “extremely powerful bombs of a new type” which “may thus be constructed”, and urged America to pursue the invention of such weapons before the Nazis. Fear of Hitler attaining atomic bombs was Einstein's sole concern. Roosevelt responded on 19 October 1939 promising to “thoroughly investigate the possibilities of your suggestion”.

After two years of analysis and inquiries, Roosevelt formally established America's nuclear program on 19 January 1942, called the Manhattan Project – with a final \$2 billion budget supporting it (\$36 billion today) and employing over 130,000 people.

Einstein himself, whose parents were Jewish, had much reason to be aggrieved with the Nazis. In March 1933, the 54-year-old Einstein was left severely shaken upon learning that men loyal to Hitler had raided his summer cottage in Caputh, a village just 30 miles from Berlin. His lakeside residence was then converted into a Hitler Youth camp. This was the due thanks afforded to Einstein after decades of glittering service to his country.

Einstein, born in the southern German city of Ulm, quickly renounced his citizenship and spent periods in Belgium and England, before settling in America by the mid-1930s.

In September 1933, after a visit to an exiled Winston Churchill, Einstein said of Hitler's rise to power,

“I cannot understand the passive response of the whole civilized world to this modern barbarism. Does the world not see that Hitler is aiming at war?”

Later, Hitler's pursuit of murderous policies would result in the deaths of about 35 million people. Yet the global human population in 1940 stood at just over 2.2 billion. Hitler's brutal methods had only reached a certain point, though he was indeed determined to wipe out the Jewish race, from Lisbon to the Urals.

Elsewhere, Hitler had recognized the path to nuclear weapons could see the earth “transformed into a glowing star” as observed in June 1942 by Albert Speer, the Third Reich’s leading war minister and architect. Speer [also noted](#) that “Hitler was plainly not delighted” the globe under his command could be incinerated by the route to obtain atomic bombs. Almost inevitably, Hitler also linked nuclear fission as belonging to “Jewish pseudo-science”.

Born 10 years after Einstein, Hitler comprised part of the First World War generation; that being, those born long before the era of endless technological advancements and mass production, which tens of millions have become accustomed to post-1945.

The Nazi leader’s vision of armaments was entrenched with antiquity, and he instinctively disapproved of modern contraptions. Of the airplane’s 1903 invention, Hitler informed the SS commander Heinrich Himmler in early November 1941 that,

“The world has ceased to be interesting since men began to fly. Until then, there were white patches on the map. The mystery has vanished, it’s all over”.

In the evening of 29 October 1941, Hitler said to an approving Field Marshal Günther von Kluge,

“In a campaign it’s the infantryman who, when all’s said, sets the tempo of operation with his legs. That consideration should bid us to keep motorization within reasonable limits. Instead of the six horses that used to pull an instrument of war, they’ve taken to using an infinitely more powerful motor-engine, with the sole objective of making possible a speed which is, in practice, unusable – that’s been proved”.

These opinions were expressed at the height of Operation Barbarossa on the Eastern Front. Meanwhile, the Nazis’ atomic bomb project was [abandoned](#) forever in the autumn of 1942. Had Einstein predicted such eventualities, he would surely not have signed his name to the Roosevelt letter; indeed, he may have strongly advised against America developing atomic weapons. In 1954, the year before he died, Einstein described his role in America’s nuclear program as the “one great mistake in my life”.

As seen, in mid-January 1942 Roosevelt [authorized](#) the atomic bomb project, one month after America declared war on Germany and Japan. Throughout 1942, America’s pursuit of the atomic bomb could be excused by pointing towards the Nazis, who still employed hugely gifted scientists like Werner Heisenberg and Wernher von Braun.

With the war advancing into 1943, it was becoming clear to the British that Hitler possessed no nuclear program, mainly due to information relayed to them from Paul Rosbaud, Britain’s spy operating in Germany. These reports were relayed to the Americans, who remained skeptical initially.

However, by spring 1944, US leaders were convinced that Hitler had no such project to develop atomic bombs. What’s more, the Wehrmacht was now set in unmistakable retreat.

Militarily-speaking, but most importantly from an ethical viewpoint, Roosevelt should have

disbanded America's nuclear program from at least early 1944. At this late date, Roosevelt's health was in steep decline, yet he still commanded office and began a fourth term as president in January 1945. It seems that Roosevelt simply could not grasp the grave threat that atomic bombs posed to the planet.

By 1944, America's ambitions with regard nuclear weapons had also shifted towards a purely imperial outlook. From winter 1943, US strategists identified that the USSR would be their principal rival at war's end – the same USSR who then ranked as America's indispensable ally against both Germany, and later Japan. America's atomic weapons were thereafter being constructed with the Russians in mind, as confirmed in 1944 by Leslie Groves, who was directing the Manhattan Project.

Over dinner in March 1944, Groves told his nuclear physicist Joseph Rotblat that "the real purpose in making the bomb was to subdue the Soviets". Rotblat was "terribly shocked" to hear this and in late 1944 he resigned from the program.

Rotblat was the only scientist to depart America's nuclear project on ethical grounds. This is perhaps not so surprising. The typical scientist, once set towards an important task, becomes consumed by the work, convincing him or herself that the research they are conducting is morally correct and of benefit to humankind – even when the mounting evidence suggests otherwise. After all, why did almost the entirety of America's scientists continue working on the atomic bomb when Hitler was defeated, and Japan virtually so?

Despite many scientists possessing very high levels of intelligence, they can submit willingly to state power, unquestioningly obeying orders from government bosses. Some scientists are heroic and others less so. A good number too are naive to politics and the surrounding world, assuring themselves that their country's leaders are of sound character. The Manhattan Project is a landmark example of this glaring lack of political and moral awareness regarding scientists.

In late morning of 24 July 1945, the combined American and British Chiefs of Staff convened near Berlin to discuss the atomic bomb, with new US president Harry Truman in attendance, along with British counterpart Churchill. Amid all these prestigious figures, not one person put forward an objection to deployment of atomic weapons. Churchill revealed, "There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table".

Truman himself [said later](#),

"The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used".

It may be worth remembering that, throughout the latter half of World War II, American and British bombers had attacked German and Japanese cities with increasing ferocity. Since 1942, the ethical aspects of war had largely been cast to the winds. By mid-1945, hundreds of thousands of German and Japanese civilians were killed, due to indiscriminate Allied bombing. These policies had prior agreement in British and American government headquarters.

As a result, in the minds of Allied political and military chiefs, the atomic bomb was just another step towards a more powerful weapon to be used against the enemy. Yet the

absence of foresight on the Allies' part is remarkable, not to mention dangerous without precedent.

It hardly required a great mind to realize that Stalin would soon produce his own atomic arsenal, and by August 1949 the Soviet Union successfully tested a nuclear device, a replica of America's Nagasaki bomb. The policies sought first by Roosevelt, and pushed through by Truman with British support, have seen the world become indescribably dangerous after 1945.

In November 1952 (again under Truman) the Americans developed the hydrogen bomb, up to a thousand times more powerful than its atomic cousin. The Soviets quickly followed suit. In 1947, the Doomsday Clock had been established by atomic scientists, and come 1953 they advanced its hand to two minutes to midnight (apocalypse), which is its position today.

Once more, with the hydrogen bomb's creation, lack of concern for our globe and humanity as a whole is indeed staggering. The elapsing decades have witnessed many close calls and near-accidents – the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis standing out most clearly.

Entering 2019, the threat of nuclear conflict is likely higher than during the Cold War's darkest days. This is mostly due to aggressive policies engineered by the Donald Trump administration, governing the world's dominant nuclear and military power.

It is borne out in Trump's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, which lowers the threshold for war; his trillion dollar modernization of America's nuclear arsenal sparking another arms race; his plan to ditch Cold War-era treaties that attempted to contain nuclear threats and further proliferation; his amassing of huge US forces to encircle nuclear-armed China; NATO's continuing intimidation and provocation of Russia, another nuclear superpower.

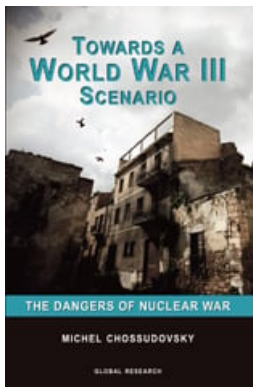
Trump's climate actions have also constituted a catastrophe, the result of which saw America's carbon emissions rise by over 3% in 2018. It is, for reasons such as these, that the Doomsday Clock is likely to advance once more later this January, for the third consecutive year. In that case, it is the closest the hand will have ever been to midnight.

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[“Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War”](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

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[PDF Edition](#): \$6.50 (sent directly to your email account!)

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Reviews

“This book is a ‘must’ resource – a richly documented and systematic diagnosis of the supremely pathological geo-strategic planning of US wars since ‘9-11’ against non-nuclear countries to seize their oil fields and resources under cover of ‘freedom and democracy’.”

–John McMurtry, Professor of Philosophy, Guelph University

“In a world where engineered, pre-emptive, or more fashionably “humanitarian” wars of aggression have become the norm, this challenging book may be our final wake-up call.”

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Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

–Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute



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