

# Bulletin of Atomic Scientists warns of “civilization-ending nuclear war”

Andre Damon  
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On Wednesday, Congressman Adam Schiff, speaking from the Senate floor during the second day of the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump, said “the United States aids Ukraine and her people so that we can fight Russia over there and we don’t have to fight Russia here.”

For most of the American population, the assertion that “we” are fighting Russia will come as a surprise.

For years, the media has laughed off the danger of a war between the United States and Russia or China as a “conspiracy theory.” But Schiff raised the United States fighting Russia not just as a possibility, but as a statement of present fact.

The United States and Russia each possesses over 6,000 nuclear weapons. Just a fraction of these is sufficient to kill billions of people and destroy human society. A war between these two countries, in other words, would be a cataclysmic disaster.

And yet, the entire political establishment, from the Democrats with their anti-Russian hysteria to Trump with his bullying threats against the whole world are preparing for military conflict on a scale not seen since World War II.

On Thursday, the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, which for more than seven decades has maintained a Doomsday Clock, warned that human civilization is closer to midnight, i.e., total destruction, than at any other period in history, including the Cuban Missile Crisis at the height of the Cold War.

“Civilization-ending nuclear war—whether started by design, blunder, or simple miscommunication— is a genuine possibility,” the group said in its annual report. “Any belief that the threat of nuclear war has been vanquished is a mirage.”

The report adds, “To say the world is nearer to doomsday today than during the Cold War... is to make

a profound assertion that demands serious explanation.”

It adds: “[T]he international political infrastructure for controlling existential risk is degrading, leaving the world in a situation of high and rising threat. Global leaders are not responding appropriately to reduce this threat level and counteract the hollowing-out of international political institutions, negotiations, and agreements that aim to contain it. The result is a heightened and growing risk of disaster.”

Last year, the United States withdrew from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which prohibited the deployment of land-based missiles, including nuclear missiles, with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.

Led by the United States, the world’s nuclear powers are massively expanding and modernizing their arsenals. In December, the US tested a ballistic missile that would have violated the treaty.

These moves are part of US preparations for what Defense Secretary Mark Esper called “high-intensity conflicts against competitors such as Russia and China.”

The latest missile test came just days after House Democrats voted for a massive military spending bill that stripped out language limiting the Trump administration’s ability to develop and deploy new nuclear weapons, while handing the president the largest military budget in US history.

After withdrawing from the INF treaty in August, the Trump White House is moving rapidly ahead with a \$1 trillion plan to expand, “modernize” and miniaturize the US nuclear arsenal, effectively putting US nuclear forces on a hair trigger.

The expansion of US nuclear forces is central to the Trump Administration’s refocus on preparations for

“great-power conflict” with Russia and China, in line with its doctrine, announced in 2018, that “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”

Elbridge A. Colby, one of the principal authors of the National Defense Strategy published by the Pentagon in January of 2018, commented in *Foreign Affairs*:

When future historians look back at the actions of the United States in the early twenty-first century, by far the most consequential story will be the way Washington refocused its attention on great-power competition.

It was time to call a spade a spade. The Trump administration, more realistic and blunter than its predecessors, did just that. “Trump,” as Henry Kissinger pointed out in the *Financial Times* in 2018, “may be one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era and to force it to give up its old pretenses.”

The US military has made clear that its overriding concern today is how to effectively defend the likes of Taiwan and the Baltic states against a potential Chinese or Russian attack.

It is clear that any such conflict risks escalation into nuclear war. Last year, Colby penned an article in *Foreign Affairs* titled, “If You Want Peace, Prepare for Nuclear War.” He wrote:

The risks of nuclear brinkmanship may be enormous, but so is the payoff from gaining a nuclear advantage over an opponent.

Any future confrontation with Russia or China could go nuclear... In a harder-fought, more uncertain struggle, each combatant may be tempted to reach for the nuclear saber to up the ante and test the other side’s resolve, or even just to keep fighting.

“The best way to avoid a nuclear war,” Colby continued, “is to be ready to fight a limited one.” In this dangerous world, “US officials” must demonstrate

that “the United States is prepared to conduct limited, effective nuclear operations.”

All of these policies are mad, and the people advocating them are criminals. But the universality of these plans—the fact that every major power is rearming—makes clear that this is the insanity not of individuals, but of a social class and a social order. It symptomatic of a crisis-ridden capitalist system, which is the root cause of war and attacks on democratic rights.

But all over the world, the working class, the only social force capable of stopping the resurgence of capitalist barbarism, is engaged in a wave of strikes and social upheavals. It is urgently necessary for workers entering into struggle against social inequality to take up the fight against imperialist war as a critical and inseparable part of the fight for socialism.



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