[**Doomsday Clock 2023**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1735158/doomsday-clock-2023)

[Ashraf Jehangir Qazi](https://www.dawn.com/authors/3400/ashraf-jehangir-qazi) Published February 4, 2023

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.

Listen to article

ON Jan 24, 2023, The Doomsday Clock (DDC) was set at 90 seconds to midnight. This was closer to ‘qiyamat’ than ever before. According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (BAS) the new setting was “due largely but not exclusively to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the increased risk of nuclear escalation”. The other reasons cited were the climate crisis and the breakdown of global norms and institutions which could contain the risks of advancing technologies and biological threats such as Covid-19.

The DDC reset was announced on the eve of the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Accordingly, Ukraine displaced global warming and the nuclear threat as the foremost threat to mankind, and Russia displaced the corporate capitalist system as the chief villain. Unfortunately, the highly respected BAS appears to have allowed itself to be hijacked by the US-led propaganda apparatus.

There is no doubt Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was illegal, indeed criminal, no matter what the provocation. And provocation was indeed provided to ensure Putin would have no option but to respond in the way he did. None of this is indicated in the BAS report. None of this excuses Russia. Equally, none of this should excuse the deliberate and carefully planned provocation of Russia by the US and Nato. By choosing to ignore this the BAS has done itself and its readers a disservice.

The US is determined not to allow the restoration of peace in Ukraine. It wants to defeat and humiliate Russia — which is what the Ukraine conflict is all about. It wants regime change in Moscow. It wants to dismantle the strategic partnership of Russia and China which is the major challenge to its global hegemony. The US is not interested in global peace if it is not based on US global hegemony. Similarly, it is not interested in prioritising the challenge of climate change unless it is within the context of US global hegemony.

The stakes are no longer national, geopolitical or geo-economic.

The US is providing Ukraine with Patriot missiles that threaten targets deep within Russia. In turn, Russia may target US personnel training Ukrainian operators of the missiles. In such an event the US will inevitably respond. Escalation is guaranteed.

Both the US and Russia are nuclear weapons superpowers. Neither have a reliable first strike capability against the other. However, if one or both sides feel they have developed such a capability the temptation to strike before the other does so could become irresistible.

Detaching the Donbas and Crimea from Russia, expanding Nato to the borders of Russia, and compelling Europe to abandon energy cooperation with Russia in an effort to bankrupt it are part of the larger US strategy to isolate China and halt its emergence as the principal challenge to US global hegemony. Is this a scenario in which any of the COP targets to meet the challenge of impending climate catastrophe can be achieved? A US military general predicts war between the US and China by 2025. The US is apparently less concerned about what climate warming will do to human civilisation by 2050 than what the balance of power between the US and China will be by 2050. It wants to strike while it is still the global supremo.

According to Noam Chomsky, President Biden has “declared virtual war on China, and Congress is seething at the bit to break the ‘strategic ambiguity’ that has maintained peace regarding Taiwan for 50 years”. Just as it provoked the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it appears determined to provoke China with regard to Taiwan knowing that China will never countenance Taiwan becoming irreversibly independent thereby strategically confining China within the South China Sea with all its consequences for China as a global economic power. This would bring about massive political instability in China with all its consequences for Asia and the rest of the world.

Bending the knee to the global hegemon may be rational from a realpolitik point of view. But it no longer makes sense. The stakes are no longer national, geopolitical or geo-economic. They are global and existential. The world has to begin to come together in peaceful cooperation and competition to meet, mitigate and minimise the colossal challenge of global warming and its thousands of lethal offshoots. However, it has to first reverse what is happening in order to begin. This will require the non-superpowers of the world to initiate and organise discussions and movements to persuade global public opinion to stop “the masters of the universe” from destroying the world. They will need to closely interact and coordinate with similar movements in the developed world.

In its more balanced 2022 report the BAS refer­red to “a corrupted information ecosphere that undermines rational decision-making” as a third existential threat after climate warming and the nuclear threat. Chomsky, moreover, observes “if we don’t have the possibility of rational discourse of major issues, then nothing else matters, we’re finished”. But today’s incessant media manufactures information, indignation, outrage and hate which obliterate the possibilities for rational discourse and compromise, without which challenges will not even be addressed, let alone overcome.

The IMF descends upon Pakistan when it is faced with economic calamity and its political leaders happily waste time in litigation and mutual imprecations. They will gladly accept the IMF’s “tough love” as long as it requires neither radical structural change nor poverty reduction as a conditionality. Such financial “benefactors” gladly provide a fish a day while not insisting on any learning to fish.

How will such a Pakistan set an example on how to address any challenge? How will it prioritise education, rationality, science, justice, compromise, cooperation and tolerance as the hallmarks of its faith? How will it combat terrorism if it cannot publicly denounce terrorist organisations that murder Muslims at prayer in mosques as beyond the pale of Islam? How will it fashion a climate politics in place of realpolitik? How will it facilitate movements to mitigate threats listed by the BAS and help push the DDC away from striking midnight? There is still time for actions to provide hopeful answers.

*The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.*  
[ashrafjqazi@gmail.com](http://mailto:ashrafjqazi@gmail.com)  
[www.ashrafjqazi.com](http://www.ashrafjqazi.com)

*Published in Dawn, February 4th, 2023*