

85 SECONDS TO MIDNIGHT: DOOMSDAY CLOCK TICKS DOWN 4 SECONDS, CLOSEST EVER TO HUMAN EXTINCTION

“Failure of Leadership”: Doomsday Clock Moves Closer to Midnight as Global Existential Threats Worsen. Experts Cite New START Expiration, Record-Breaking Climate Trends, AI, Various Bio-Security Concerns Among Other Factors.

WASHINGTON, DC – January 27, 2026 – The [Doomsday Clock was set at 85 seconds to midnight](#), the closest ever the Clock has been to midnight in its history. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’ Science and Security Board* (SASB), which sets the Clock, called for urgent action to limit nuclear arsenals, create international guidelines on the use of AI, and form multilateral agreements to address global biological threats.

Alexandra Bell, president and CEO, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, said: **“The Doomsday Clock’s message cannot be clearer. Catastrophic risks are on the rise, cooperation is on the decline, and we are running out of time. Change is both necessary and possible, but the global community must demand swift action from their leaders.”**

The Doomsday Clock time is annually determined by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’ Science and Security Board* (SASB) in consultation with its Board of Sponsors, which includes eight Nobel Laureates. Major factors in 2026 included growing nuclear weapons threats, disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), multiple biological security concerns, and the continuing climate crisis. The Clock’s time changed most recently in January 2025, when the Doomsday Clock was set at 89 seconds to midnight.

Daniel Holz, PhD, professor at the University of Chicago in the Departments of Physics, Astronomy & Astrophysics, the Enrico Fermi Institute and the Kavli Institute for Cosmological Physics, and SASB chair, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, said: **“The dangerous trends in nuclear risk, climate change, disruptive technologies like AI, and biosecurity are accompanied by another frightening development: the rise of nationalistic autocracies in countries around the world. Our greatest challenges require international trust and cooperation, and a world splintering into ‘us versus them’ will leave all of humanity more vulnerable.”**

Maria Ressa, Co-founder and CEO of Rappler, professor of Professional Practice at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, said: **“Without facts, there is no truth. Without truth, there is no trust. And without these, the radical collaboration this moment demands is impossible. We are living through an information Armageddon—the crisis beneath all crises—driven by extractive and predatory technology that spreads lies faster than facts and profits from our division. We cannot solve problems we cannot agree exist. We cannot cooperate across borders when we cannot even share the same facts. Nuclear threats, climate collapse, AI risks: none can be addressed without first rebuilding our shared reality. The clock is ticking.”**

The [2026 Doomsday Clock statement](#) says:

A year ago, we warned that the world was perilously close to global disaster and that any delay in reversing course increased the probability of catastrophe. Rather than heed this warning, Russia, China, the United States, and other major countries have instead become increasingly aggressive, adversarial, and nationalistic. Hard-won global understandings are collapsing, accelerating a winner-takes-all great power competition and undermining the international cooperation critical to reducing the risks of nuclear war, climate change, the misuse of biotechnology, the potential threat of artificial intelligence, and other apocalyptic dangers. Far too many leaders have grown complacent and indifferent, in many cases adopting rhetoric and policies that accelerate rather than mitigate these existential risks. Because of this failure of leadership, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Science and Security Board today sets the Doomsday Clock at 85 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to catastrophe. ...

Even as the hands of the Doomsday Clock move closer to midnight, there are many actions that could pull humanity back from the brink:

- o *The United States and Russia can resume dialogue about limiting their nuclear arsenals. All nuclear-armed states can avoid destabilizing investments in missile defense and observe the existing moratorium on explosive nuclear testing.*
- o *Through both multilateral agreements and national regulations, the international community can take all feasible steps to prevent the creation of mirror life and cooperate on meaningful measures to reduce the prospect that AI be used to create biological threats.*
- o *The United States Congress can repudiate President Trump's war on renewable energy, instead providing incentives and investments that will enable rapid reduction in fossil fuel use.*
- o *The United States, Russia, and China can engage in bilateral and multilateral dialogue on meaningful guidelines regarding the incorporation of artificial intelligence in their militaries, particularly in nuclear command and control systems.*

Nuclear Weapons: Sliding further down a slippery nuclear slope

Jon B. Wolfsthal, director of global risk at the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), and SASB member, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, said: **"In 2025 it was almost impossible to identify a nuclear issue that got better. More states are relying more intently on nuclear weapons, multiple states are openly talking about using nuclear weapons for not only deterrence, but for coercion. Hundreds of billions are being spent to modernize and expand nuclear arsenals all over the world, and more and more non-nuclear states are considering whether they should acquire their own nuclear weapons or are hedging their nuclear bets. Instead of stoking the fires of the nuclear arms competition, nuclear states are reducing their own security and putting the entire planet at risk. Leaders of all states must relearn the lessons of the Cold War – no one wins a nuclear arms race and the only way to reduce nuclear dangers is through binding agreement to limit the size and shape of their nuclear arsenals. Nuclear states and their partners need to invest now in proven crisis communication and risk reduction tools, recommit to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, refrain from nuclear threats, and pursue a more predictable and stable global security system."**

Disruptive Technologies: Competition crowds out cooperation

Steve Fetter, PhD, professor of public policy and former dean, University of Maryland, fellow, American Physical Society (APS), member, National Academy of Sciences' (NAS) Committee on International Security and Arms Control (CISAC), and SASB member, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, said: **"As uses of AI expand and concerns grow about potential risks, Trump revoked Biden's AI safety initiative and banned states from crafting their own AI regulation, reflecting a 'damn the torpedoes' approach to AI development. The emphasis on technological competition is making it increasingly difficult to foster the cooperation that will be needed to identify and mitigate risks, and attacks against universities and cuts in federal funding are eroding our ability to come up with effective solutions."**

Climate Change: A troubling outlook

Inez Fung, ScD, Professor Emerita of Atmospheric Science in the Department of Earth and Planetary Science and the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the University of California, Berkeley, and SASB member, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, said: **"Reducing the threat of climate catastrophe requires actions both to address the cause and to deal with the damage of climate change. First and foremost come reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels to produce energy. Many technologies for renewable energy are now mature and cost effective, and governments should ramp up the wide deployment of these clean energy technologies by providing incentives to produce them on a large scale and to create markets for them. Equally important in the fight against climate change is renewed reliance on science that tracks and guides emission reduction and mitigation efforts. This return to science-based climate policy includes the collection, validation, and sharing of climate and greenhouse gas information around the world, as well as the enhancement of model projections of climate impacts on the wellbeing of all inhabitants of the planet."**

Biological Threats: Degraded capacity and major concerns

Asha M. George, DrPH, executive director, Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense at the Atlantic Council, and SASB member, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, said: **“This year featured degraded capacity to respond to biological events, further development and pursuit of biological weapons, poorly restrained synthetic biology activities, increasingly convergent AI and biology, and the specter of life-ending mirror biology. Partnerships – between countries, between industry and government, and between the public health and national security communities – will be key to managing these risks. With the right tools and determination, we need not fall prey to the diseases that threaten us.”**

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* was founded in 1945 by Albert Einstein, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and University of Chicago scientists who helped develop the first atomic weapons in the Manhattan Project. The *Bulletin* created the Doomsday Clock two years later to convey man-made threats to human existence and the planet. The Clock is a reminder of the world’s vulnerability to catastrophe and a symbol that there is still time left to act.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: Additional members of the *Bulletin’s* Science and Security Board will be available for interviews on the day of and after the announcement: <https://thebulletin.org/about-us/science-and-security-board/>.

An embeddable HD stream of the announcement is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/ulvUJuiqwso>.

Following the announcement, hi-res video, photos, headshots and logos will be available to members of the media at <https://bit.ly/DDC2026PressKit>. A streaming replay of the Doomsday Clock announcement and the full text of the 2026 Statement will be available online at <https://www.thebulletin.org/>.