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The Nuclear Threat: Flaws in the U.S. Stance

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In January of 2017, the highly respected Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' Science and Security Board set the famous Doomsday Clock, which measures the likelihood of a man-made catastrophe (with midnight being annihilation of the human species), to two and a half minutes to midnight, which is the closest it has been since the Cold War period. The Board cited the environmental catastrophe looming above our heads and the growing prospect of nuclear war as imminent existential threats to humanity. Though this change should have been plastered on the front pages of every publication claiming to study the news, it was not. But the threats still exist, and the future looks incredibly bleak for both prospects. The issue of nuclear Armageddon is rather timely — flip on the television and you'll find non-stop coverage of the crises in North Korea and Iran. It is interesting and instructive to examine the current political discussion regarding nuclear weapons and what is missing from it.

Take for instance the escalation with North Korea, a recent headliner. Any attempt at war with North Korea would inevitably lead to the deaths of millions in both Koreas, Japan, and perhaps the United States. Generals in the Trump administration — the so-called "adults" in the cabinet — seem to understand this, and so an attack is unlikely. Instead, the reckless escalation by the President is likely puffery for the Republican base, who are buying it hook, line and sinker. One alarming Quinnipiac poll showed 46 percent of Republicans want war with North Korea. One wonders what the coverage might be were there to be a poll released suggesting 46 percent of, say, Mongolians wanted war with America. Though there is incessant reporting of



coverage is the historical record that suggests a clear alternative, one the United States has repeatedly blocked. A 1994 Framework Agreement, which stipulated that North Korea would stop building nuclear weapons if the United States allowed them to develop nuclear energy was torn to shreds by the famous Bush speech about the “Axis of Evil.” A similar proposition in 2005 fell flat after instant U.S. rejection. One reason cited is that the United States and South Korea would, as per a quid pro quo, be obligated to cease intimidating military exercises on the border of North Korea. This cannot be entertained and is an unserious proposition, as the UN Ambassador for the US Nikki Haley describes.

What about the other headline, Trump de-certifying the Iran deal? Like most actions this President takes, it is all show and no substance. As Michael Wilner of FiveThirtyEight notes, it merely allows Trump to flex his muscles in front of his adoring base and boot the issue to Congress, where the terms of the deal are not likely to change. Even if the United States were to pull out of the deal, the other nations part of it would not follow suit, so newly imposed sanctions upon Iran would be largely fruitless.

The hysteria over pulling out of the deal is only part of a different kind of paranoia regarding Iran that is not addressed at all in the intellectual or political circles of this country. It has been made clear by Israel and the United States that any Iranian attempt to deploy a nuclear weapon would result in immediate destruction, so the idea they would use one is predicated on the belief that they are on a suicide mission — the concept of mutually assured destruction comes to mind. If Iran were to deploy a nuclear weapon, they would then almost immediately be obliterated. This is what we are told to believe: Iran is run by crazed leaders who seek to sacrifice themselves and their entire country. No evidence presented supports this. Yet the claim is made time and time again that Iran is the gravest threat to peace in the Middle East. Indeed, the country is frequently attacked by the United States for supporting terrorism within the region. Experts of the region quite rightly meet these claims with derision. How else can one respond to statements made by a country that continues to sell billions of dollars worth of arms to Saudi Arabia? Saudi Arabia, which uses American bombs to obliterate Yemen faster than the cheering weapons manufacturers can produce them?

Many claim that the Iran deal did not go far enough. Among them is Iranian foreign minister Javad Sharif, who writes: “if the Vienna deal is to mean anything, the whole of the Middle East must rid itself of weapons of mass destruction.” But because this would require Israel, a key US ally and a country that has refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, to make concessions, this cannot be entertained and is, again, an unserious proposition.

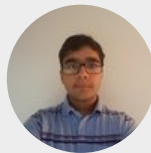
There are clear solutions to the threat of nuclear destruction that the international community have considered. In July, 120 nations signed a United Nations resolution to ban the production of nuclear weapons.

All the nuclear powers, who did not participate, met the resolution with harsh rebuke. When asked if she could envision a nuclear-free world, Ambassador Haley said it was unrealistic. She should have added that it is unrealistic because people like her and the country she represents actively undermine and ignore attempts at ameliorating the situation. Instead, vague and often bewildering claims by American officials about “good” and “bad” countries are offered to justify refusing to discuss the issue. A reminder that the United States is the only country to have used nuclear weapons in combat.

The threat of nuclear annihilation is one that is quite preventable. That nuclear powers like the United States cannot be bothered to move toward peace is, to experts, deeply troublesome and jeopardizes all of human civilization. Those who care about this issue and have a degree of privilege should seek to elect leaders and representatives that will work toward the goal of de-escalation, organize around this issue, and educate the general public on this crisis and the terrifying prospects of it. For if there comes a day when the missiles are launched and the extinction of human life begins, we will have only ourselves to blame.

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