

Invoking the Russell-Einstein Manifesto against Nuclear War

On the edge of world war

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I wrote this call for sanity to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (back in 2015).

The need for intellectuals to commit themselves body and soul to the common good, and the opposition to world war, and nuclear war, is only the greater at this horrible moment of taunting and daring launched by Presidents Biden and Putin today.

Although I most certainly cannot agree with President Biden, I am not sure that I can support the rhetoric of President Putin either.

Politicians and heads of state are the least equipped to respond to critical historical questions, especially concerning nuclear war. I would like to call on everyone to pull together and write up a similar manifesto, this time explaining how the president invokes powers that he does not possess.

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[Call for Sanity on 60th Anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto](#)

Foreign Policy in Focus

July 9, 2015

(drafted by Emanuel Pastreich)

It was exactly 60 years ago that Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein gathered together with

a group of leading intellectuals in London to [draft and sign a manifesto](#) in which they denounced the dangerous drive toward war between the world's Communist and anti-Communist factions. The signers of this manifesto included leading Nobel Prize winners such as Hideki Yukawa and Linus Pauling.

They were blunt, equating the drive for war and reckless talk of the use of nuclear weapons sweeping the United States and the Soviet Union at the time, as endangering all of humanity. The manifesto argued that advancements in technology, specifically the invention of the atomic bomb, had set human history on a new and likely disastrous course.

The manifesto stated in harsh terms the choice confronting humanity:

Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?

The Russell-Einstein Manifesto forced a serious reconsideration of the dangerous strategic direction in which the United States was heading at that time and was the beginning of a recalibration of the concept of security that would lead to the signing of the Nonproliferation Treaty in 1968 and the arms control talks of the 1970s.

But we take little comfort in those accomplishments today. The United States has completely forgotten about its obligations under the Nonproliferation Treaty, and the words "arms control" have disappeared from the conversation on security. The last year has seen the United States confront Russia in Ukraine to such a degree that many have spoken about the risks of nuclear war.

As a result, on June 16 of this year Russia announced that it will add [40 new ICBMs](#) in response to the investment of the United States over the last two years in upgrading its nuclear forces.

Similar tensions have emerged between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Isles and between the United States and China over the South China Sea. Discussions about the possibility of war with China are showing up in the Western media with increasing frequency, and a deeply disturbing push to militarize American relations with Asia is emerging.

But this time, the dangers of nuclear war are complemented by an equal, or greater, threat: climate change. Even the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Locklear, told the [Boston Globe](#) in 2013 that climate change "is probably the most likely thing that is going to happen . . . that will cripple the security environment, probably more likely than the other scenarios we all often talk about."

More recently, Pope Francis issued a detailed, and blunt, encyclical dedicated to the threat of climate change in which he charged:

It is remarkable how weak international political responses (to climate change) have been. Consequently the most one can expect is superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern for the environment, whereas any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented.

As the 60th anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto drew near, I became increasing

disturbed by the complete inaction among the best-educated and best-connected in the face of the most dangerous moment in modern history and perhaps in human history, grimmer even than the catastrophe that Russell and Einstein contemplated. Not only are we facing the increased likelihood of nuclear war, but there are signs that climate change is advancing more rapidly than previously estimated. *Science Magazine* recently released a [study](#) that predicts massive marine destruction if we follow the current trends, and even the glaciers of the Southern Antarctic Peninsula, once thought to be the most stable, are observed to be [melting rapidly](#). And yet we see not even the most superficial efforts to defend against this threat by the major powers.

I spoke informally about my worries with my friend John Feffer, director of Foreign Policy in Focus and associate of the Asia Institute. John has written extensively about the need to identify climate change as the primary security threat and also has worked closely with Miriam Pemberton of the Institute for Policy Studies on efforts to move the United States away from a military economy. Between the two of us we have put together a slightly updated version of the manifesto that highlights climate change — an issue that was not understood in 1955 — and hereby have published it in the form of a petition that we invite anyone in the world to sign. This new version of the manifesto is open to the participation of all, not restricted to that of an elite group of Nobel Prize winners.

I also spoke with David Swanson, a friend from my days working on the Dennis Kucinich campaign for the Democratic nomination back in 2004. David now serves as director of World Beyond War, a broad effort to create a consensus that war no longer has any legitimate place in human society. He offered to introduce the manifesto to a broad group of activists and we agreed that Foreign Policy in Focus, the Asia Institute and World Beyond War would co-sponsor the new manifesto.

Finally, I sent the draft to Noam Chomsky who readily offered to sign it and offered the following comment.

Last January the famous Doomsday Clock was moved two minutes closer to midnight, the closest it has been since a major war scare 30 years ago. The accompanying declaration, which warned that the constant threat of nuclear war and “unchecked climate change” severely threaten human civilization, brings to mind the grim warning to the people of the world just 60 years ago by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, calling on them to face a choice that is “stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?” In all of human history, there has never been a choice like the one we face today.

The declaration on the 60th anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto is displayed below. We urge all people who are concerned about humanity’s future and about the health of the Earth’s biosphere to join us in signing the declaration, and to invite friends and family members to sign. The statement can be signed at the [petition page](#) on DIY RootsAction website:

Declaration on the 60th Anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto

July 9, 2015

In view of the growing risk that in future wars weapons, nuclear and otherwise, will be employed that threaten the continued existence of humanity, we urge the governments

of the world to realize, and to acknowledge publicly, that their purpose cannot be furthered by a world war, and we urge them, consequently, to find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute between them.

We also propose that all governments of the world begin to convert those resources previously allocated to preparations for destructive conflict to a new constructive purpose: the mitigation of climate change and the creation of a new sustainable civilization on a global scale.

This effort is endorsed by Foreign Policy in Focus, the Asia Institute, and World Beyond War, and is being launched on July 9, 2015.

You can sign, and ask everyone you know to sign, this declaration [here](#).

Why is this declaration important?

Exactly 60 years ago today, leading intellectuals led by **Bertrand Russell** and **Albert Einstein** gathered in London to sign a manifesto voicing their concern that the struggle between the Communist and anti-Communist blocs in the age of the hydrogen bomb guaranteed annihilation for humanity.

Although we have so far avoided the nuclear war that those intellectuals dreaded, the danger has merely been postponed. The threat, which has reemerged recently with the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, has only grown more dire.

Moreover, the rapid acceleration of technological development threatens to put nuclear weapons, and many other weapons of similar destructiveness, into the hands of a growing circle of nations (and potentially even of “non-state actors”). At the same time, the early possessors of nuclear weapons have failed to abide by their obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to destroy their stockpiles.

And now we are faced with an existential threat that may rival the destructive consequences even of a full-scale nuclear war: climate change. The rapacious exploitation of our resources and a thoughtless over-reliance upon fossil fuels have caused an unprecedented disruption of our climate. Combined with an unmitigated attack on our forests, our wetlands, our oceans, and our farmland in the pursuit of short-term gains, this unsustainable economic expansion has brought us to the edge of an abyss.

The [original 1955 manifesto](#) states: “We are speaking on this occasion, not as members of this or that nation, continent, or creed, but as human beings,” members of the human species “whose continued existence is in doubt.”

The time has come for us to break out of the distorted and misleading conception of progress and development that has so seduced us and led us towards destruction.

Intellectuals bear a particular responsibility of leadership by virtue of their specialized expertise and insight regarding the scientific, cultural, and historical forces that have led to our predicament. Between a mercenary element that pursues an agenda of narrow interests without regard to consequences and a frequently discouraged, misled, and sometimes apathetic citizenry stand the intellectuals in every field of study and sphere of activity. It falls to us that it falls to decry the reckless acceleration of

armaments and the criminal destruction of the ecosystem. The time has come for us to raise our voices in a concerted effort.

Initial Signers

Noam Chomsky, professor emeritus, MIT

Last January the famous Doomsday Clock was moved two minutes closer to midnight, the closest it has been since a major war scare 30 years ago. The accompanying declaration, which warned that the constant threat of nuclear war and “unchecked climate change” severely threaten human civilization, brings to mind the grim warning to the people of the world just 50 years ago by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, calling on them to face a choice that is “stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?” In all of human history, there has never been a choice like the one we face today.

Helen Caldicott, author

It was the Russell Einstein manifesto on the threat of nuclear war 60 years ago that started me upon my journey to try to abolish nuclear weapons. I then read and devoured the three volumes of Russell’s autobiography which had an amazing influence upon my thinking as a young girl. The manifesto was so extraordinarily sensible written by two of the world’s greatest thinkers, and I am truly amazed that the world at that time took practically no notice of their prescient warning, and today we are orders of magnitude in greater danger than we were 60 years ago. The governments of the world still think in primitive terms of retribution and killing while the nuclear weapons in Russia and the US are presently maintained on hair trigger alert, and these two nuclear superpowers are practicing nuclear war drills during a state of heightened international tension exacerbated by the Ukrainian situation and the Middle East. It is in truth sheer luck that we are still here on this lovely planet of ours.

Larry Wilkerson, retired United States Army Colonel and former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell.

From central Europe to Southwest Asia, from the South China Sea to the Arctic, tensions are on the rise as the world’s sole empire is roiled in peripheral activities largely of its own doing and just as largely destructive of its power and corruptive of its leadership. This, while humanity’s most pressing challenge—planetary climate change—threatens catastrophe for all. Stockpiles of nuclear weapons add danger to this already explosive situation. We humans have never been so powerfully challenged—and so apparently helpless to do anything about it.

Benjamin R. Barber, president, Global Parliament of Mayors Project

Naomi Klein, author of *This Changes Everything*

David Swanson, director, World Beyond War

John Feffer, director, Foreign Policy in Focus

Emanuel Pastreich, director, The Asia Institute

Alice Slater, NY director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and serves on the Coordinating Committee of Abolition 2000.

Leah Bolger, chair, coordinating committee, World Beyond War

Ben Griffin, coordinator, [Veterans For Peace UK](#)

Michael Nagler, founder and president, [The Metta Center for Nonviolence](#)

John Horgan, science journalist & author of *The End of War*

Kevin Zeese, co-director, Popular Resistance.

Margaret Flowers, M.D., co-director of Popular Resistance

Dahr Jamail, staff reporter, Truthout

John Kiriakou, associate fellow, Institute for Policy Studies and CIA Torture Whistleblower

Kim Hyung yul, president of the Asia Institute and professor of history, Sook Myung University

Choi Murim, professor of medicine, Seoul National University

Coleen Rowley, retired FBI agent and former Minneapolis Division legal counsel

Ann Wright, retired U.S. Army Colonel and former US diplomat

Mike Madden, vice president, Veterans For Peace, Chapter 27 (veteran of the US Air Force)

Chante Wolf, 12 year Air Force, Desert Shield/Storm veteran, member of Chapter 27, Veterans For Peace

William Binney, former NSA technical director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis and co-founder of the SIGINT Automation Research Center.

Jean Bricmont, professor, Université Catholique de Louvain

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He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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