

The Doomsday Clock of Bulletin of Atomic Scientists just clicked to 85 seconds to midnight—the closest it has ever been. That’s because the United States and Russia let the new START Treaty expire earlier this month, leaving the world’s largest nuclear weapons powers without caps on their arsenals for the first time in a half century. The two countries had extended the accord by five years in 2021 and as the deadline approached Russia offered to keep in place the accord’s limits: 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads on 700 delivery systems including missiles, aircraft and submarines for another year while talks continued. President Trump rejected the proposal saying “If it expires, it expires”. As a result, neither side is bound by verifiable limits on their warheads or delivery systems. That will be an invitation to a new nuclear arms race and a greater risk of a nuclear war. That is because the inspection for checking each other’s nuclear-related sites has now disappeared and precisely at when mistrust between Russia and the United States is very high.

Proliferation of nuclear weapons will be a problem down the road. When the last treaty was signed, China had just a few hundred warheads; now it could have about as many as Russia and the United States by the end of the decade. Emerging powers are entering the picture. With European and Asian allies worrying that the United States will no longer protect them, Germany, Poland and Japan are openly discussing their own nuclear breakout. Given the uncertainty, second tier nuclear powers like Britain and France are more likely to increase their arsenals. And third-tier countries like India, Pakistan and North Korea will rush to keep up. With every new bomb and every new player, the risk of war due to misstep, miscalculation, or misunderstanding increases.

But despite a global movement calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons and the entry into force of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in January 2021, no nuclear armed country has agreed to endorse such a call. Our state has an important role to play in urging our federal government to take a new look at policies that make it more likely that the unthinkable will happen. That is what SJ4 is all about. It is a call to take our country back from the brink of nuclear war. -Other state legislative bodies have passed resolutions similar to this one. Enough is enough. It is time to usher in a new era of real security. The passage of SJ4 by the Maryland Senate would be a step in marshalling public opinion in the right direction.

Michael J. Keller
Board Chair, Maryland Peace Action