



CDiSS COMMENTARY

National Defence University Malaysia (NDUM)
Centre for Defence and International Security Studies (CDiSS)

cdisscommentary.upnm.edu.my

No. 61 - 13 September 2021

CDiSS NDUM Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical issues and contemporary developments. CDiSS commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. These commentaries may be reproduced electronically or in print with prior permission from CDiSS and due recognition to the author(s) and CDiSS. To contribute article and provide comment or feedback, please email the Editor at bahamzah8@hotmail.com

ARMAGEDDON WILL BENEFIT NO ONE

By
Lim Teck Ghee

The problem with a war-oriented strategy is that there are no winners from any nuclear war. What is certain is that we will be left with an unlivable radioactive Earth.

The Covid-19 pandemic sweeping the world and failure of governments to address climate change impacts, and global warming have been dominating headlines. This has led to some concern about the vulnerability of societies and nations in the world to catastrophe from an unavoidable doomsday scenario.

At the same time, predictions of doomsday or the ending of the world have been around for a long time. Most people either shrug it off or dismiss the warnings outright. However, the latest developments in our region of the world should alert the public and governments to this heightened possibility.

The most recent warning comes from former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger. In a recent meeting at the McCain Institute's Sedona Forum on global issues, he warned that US-China relations can engulf the entire world in an Armageddon-like clash between the two military and technology giants.

According to the widely-respected diplomat, who crafted the historic 1971 detente between Washington and Beijing, the current economic, military and technological strengths of the two superpowers carry more risks than the cold war between the US and the Soviet Union.

Kissinger noted that while nuclear weapons were already large enough to destroy the entire world, advances in nuclear technology and artificial intelligence have multiplied the doomsday threat.

Pointing out that humanity, for the first time in human history, now has the capacity to extinguish itself in a finite period of time, he stressed that “to the nuclear issue is added the hi-tech issue, which in the field of artificial intelligence, in its essence is based on the fact that man becomes a partner of machines, and that machines can develop their own judgment.

“So in a military conflict between hi-tech powers, it’s of colossal significance.”

Kissinger omitted to mention that besides a failing in machines, human conduct can also be faulty. We have seen this happen numerous times in the actions of suicide terrorists and other crazies’ intent on leaving the world in a blaze of glory and taking everyone else with them.

Doomsday can come about not only by accident but by human design and intent.

Doomsday clock ticking closer to midnight

A grim reminder on the doomsday clock ticking away comes from the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS). Founded in 1945 by Einstein and scientists who helped to develop the first atomic weapons, the BAS created the doomsday clock using the spectre of apocalypse (midnight) and the countdown to zero to convey threats to humanity and the planet.

The clock, which has become a universally recognised indicator of the world’s vulnerability to catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, and disruptive technologies was set this year at 100 seconds to midnight. This timing is the nearest that the clock has been set to the moment in time when Earth will be blown up and mankind obliterated.

Despite its pessimism, the BAS noted: “We continue to believe that human beings can manage the dangers posed by modern technology, even in times of crisis. But if humanity is to avoid an existential catastrophe ... national leaders must do a far better job of countering disinformation, heeding science and cooperating to diminish global risks.

“Citizens around the world can and should organise and demand – through public protests, at ballot boxes and in other creative ways – that their governments reorder their priorities and cooperate domestically and internationally to reduce the risk of nuclear war, climate change and other global disasters, including pandemic disease.

War talk in Asia Pacific

The scientists’ message to the world continues to be ignored by many political leaders. To avoid nuclear disaster, Kissinger had called for a two-pronged US

policy that would maintain a constant dialogue and find areas of cooperation. However, both the Trump and Biden administrations seem to be more concerned with inflaming public opinion that China is “an inherent enemy” and that the main task for the US and its allies is to confront China militarily.

The latest counter-productive war talk comes from the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, who warned that “the way we fight the next major war is going to look very different from the way we fought the last ones”.

He called for the US military to harness technological advances and better integrate military operations globally to “understand faster, decide faster and act faster”.

Act faster to destroy China quicker appears to be the default US military position now. The problem with this war-oriented strategy is that there are no winners from any nuclear war. What is certain is that we will be left with an unlivable radioactive earth.

More belligerent chest-thumping anti-China talk has come from Australia, with the new Minister of Defence, Peter Dutton, publicly agreeing with colleagues in his party that the prospects of a battle over Taiwan could happen quite soon.

He was joined by Home Affairs Minister Mike Pezzullo, who in a provocative publicity seeking message to his staff on Anzac day claimed that “the drums of war” were beating, and he warned that Australia should be prepared to “send off, yet again, our warriors to fight”.

Beijing’s response to the latest war talk has been measured. China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said: “China must and will be reunified. We are willing to do our best to strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification but we will never leave any space for ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist activities in any form.

“It is hoped that the Australian side will fully recognise that the Taiwan question is highly sensitive, abide by the one-China principle, be prudent in its words and deeds, avoid sending any wrong signals to the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces”.

There are cooler heads in Australia pushing back against the acceleration of the doomsday clock. One reader in response to the article “Standing Up to the Politics of Xi’s China” in a leading Australian newspaper has given his fellow Australians and government this prudent advice: “If we leave them alone, cease the histrionics ... they (China and Taiwan) will sort themselves out peacefully in the fullness of time when cooler heads prevail. Stop the playground antics of egging them to fight for our own motives and “pleasure”.

“Do not send young people to die in a foreign land because of your ignorance, your politics of distraction to deflect from your own domestic failures and your need to win re-election.”

Unfortunately, this is a minority view in an increasingly war-mongering leadership, described by former prime minister Kevin Rudd as addicted to the drug of “‘standing up to China’ every day of the week” and instigating a China panic public opinion.

This article was published in *The Sun Daily* dated 24 May 2021. Republished with permission from *The Sun Daily*.

CENTRE FOR DEFENCE AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES (CDISS)

National Defence University of Malaysia

Sungai Besi Camp, 57000 Kuala Lumpur

Phone: (+603) 9051 3400 ext. 4618

Fax: (+603) 9051 3031

E-mail: cdiss@upnm.edu.my