

# **Nuclear Danger**

**Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office**  
*A Ministry of the Church of the Brethren General Board*

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## ***A THREAT UNLIKE ANY OTHER***

“Never in the span of human existence have we known such an ultimate threat to life itself.” This statement, made by the Church of the Brethren General Board, refers to the “ultimate threat” of nuclear war. Written in 1984, this reflection on the inherent dangers of nuclear weapons still resonates almost twenty years later.

Today, we live in a world where the number of countries developing weapons of mass destruction only increases. We live in a world where entire nations are crushed under the weight of a nuclear arms race. We live in a frightening world where such weapons are seen not only as a sign of power, but as a necessity for survival. We live in a world where nuclear weapons remain on a hair-trigger alert, waiting to be fired – or mis-fired – at a moment’s notice. We live in a frightening world. Never before have we known such an ultimate threat *to the world itself*.



*A 37-kiloton atom bomb*

## ***A WORLD OF WEAPONS***

Although the United States and Russia each currently maintain a stockpile of approximately 10,000 nuclear weapons (more than any other country), they are not the only nations to possess these weapons of mass destruction. Below is a partial list depicting the suspected number of strategic (designed to soar across national borders) and tactical (for use on the battlefield) nuclear weapons.

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>STRATEGIC</b>	<b>TACTICAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>8,646</b>	<b>2,010</b>	<b>10,656</b>
<b>Russia</b>	<b>~6,000</b>	<b>~4,000</b>	<b>~10,000</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>60+?</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>24-48</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>24-48</b>

Estimates as of September 2002, provided by the Center for Defense Information

## ***A GLIMMER OF HOPE . . .***

*Why do these nations need so many potentially devastating weapons of mass destruction?* That very question has sparked an initiative to reduce the mammoth stockpiles maintained by both the United States and Russia. US President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the Moscow Treaty (also known as the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, or SORT) in May of 2002. According to this agreement, America's nuclear arsenal, currently holding at 10,700 nuclear weapons, would be reduced to between 2,200 and 1,700 by the end of 2012. The acceptance of the resolution by the US Senate earlier this year represents a modest victory in the effort to achieve nuclear disarmament. Yet there is more work to be done....

***. . . AGAINST A DARKENING HORIZON***

Although the Moscow Treaty is a promising sign toward nuclear disarmament, a new Cold War looms in the distance. A push to develop new nuclear weapons has begun. The US administration's 2004 defense budget included two startling provisions that could enter the US – and the rest of the world – into a new arms race. First, the budget allocates \$15 million for research on the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), commonly called the "bunker buster." RNEP's could create a blast 70 times more powerful than that unleashed upon Hiroshima. Because they explode underground, irradiated earth is sent hurtling through the air, creating a radioactive environment well beyond the initial target. Second, this budget request seeks to repeal the Spratt-Furse provision, a 1993 ban on the development of low-yield nuclear weapons (also called "mini-nukes"). Unlike strategic nuclear weapons (which are developed and maintained on the principle of non-use and deterrence), the theory behind these tactical nukes is that they could actually be used on the battlefield, a frightening prospect in and of itself.

These two provisions clearly represent America's increasing reliance on military force and weapons of mass destruction. At the end of May, the US Senate voted to repeal the Spratt-Furse provision and to allow \$15 million for RNEP research.

### **TAKE ACTION**

The threat of nuclear war CAN be averted. Contact your members of Congress and ask them to take further steps in the effort to reduce the growing nuclear threat. Encourage your Senators and Representatives to support:

- the establishment of a strict timetable for the reduction of nuclear weapons and retired warheads under the Moscow Treaty;
- the effective dismantling and destruction of those weapons decommissioned under this treaty;
- the removal of nuclear weapons from their current hair-trigger status;
- continued reductions in the US nuclear stockpile, even beyond those goals set by SORT;
- a halt in the development of the smaller (although no less dangerous) tactical nuclear weapons;
- a reduction in the amount of federal money aimed toward the development of nuclear weapons;
- the re-allocation of money toward life-affirming projects, such as assistance to needy families, protection of the environment, and AIDS research/relief.

### **CHURCH POLICY**

The Church of the Brethren strongly opposes the development and use of nuclear weapons. "Never in the span of human existence have we known such ultimate threat to life itself. Under the banner of national security, our nation fuels a nuclear arms race; but it has not made us more secure." As a result, the Church encourages its members to "declare their properties as nuclear-free zones as a signal of their rejection of nuclear warfare" (**General Board Statement, "In This Time of Terrible Belligerence," 1984**).



*The "Peacekeeper" Intercontinental Ballistic Missile*

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For more information on the nuclear threat, go to:  
[www.brethren.org/genbd/washofc/NuclearDanger.htm](http://www.brethren.org/genbd/washofc/NuclearDanger.htm)