

Nuclear Danger

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

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 over 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 currently maintain a stockpile of approximately 26,000 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.

COUNTRY	STRATEGIC	TACTICAL	TOTAL (Including Reserve)
United States	5,235	500	10,000
Russia	3,500	2,330	16,000
China	80	50	200
United Kingdom	100	100	200
India	?	?	~75-115
Pakistan	?	?	~65-90
North Korea	?	?	~0-7

Estimates as of January 2006, provided by the “Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist”

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 represents a modest victory in the effort to achieve nuclear disarmament. In addition, for the second year in a row, Congress denied funding for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP) system. Otherwise known as the "bunker buster," the administration had hopes of developing RNEP to serve as an underground nuclear strike option. This funding has been denied for the last two years, and does not appear in current budget plans for fiscal year 2007.

... 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. With fears that existing nuclear weapons supplies may serve unreliable, the House and Senate panels met the administration's \$27.7 million request to fund a new weapon program known as the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW). Currently two companies are competing for the contract, and lawmakers hope the weapon will enable the US to maintain its "strategic deterrent" position. This increased funding comes as part of a \$127 million defense plan package for fiscal year 2007 that also includes funding for a submarine project that would enable each vessel 22 nuclear-armed and two conventionally armed missiles.

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:

- **ELIMINATION OF THE \$27.7 MILLION FOR RRW RESEARCH IN THIS YEAR'S BUDGET**
- 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. We seek to intimidate enemies with the threat of nuclear weapons, calling it deterrence; but it has not deterred other nations in their weapons buildups. It has only heightened the mutual threat... we must assess the action of our own nation... making a change in national priorities to favor life instead of death."

(General Board Statement, "In This Time of Terrible Belligerence," 1984).

For more information on this and other issues, contact the Brethren Witness/Washington Office at:

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For more information on the nuclear threat, go to:
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