

FACTS & PERSPECTIVES ON UNITED STATES NUCLEAR WEAPONS*

FACT: The world stands at a crossroad. Nearly 79 years after the United States dropped nuclear bombs on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the danger of nuclear war and the end of civilization (as we know it) is arguably higher than ever before.

FICTION: Nuclear weapons provide “security” for the countries that have them, and for other countries under what is called the “nuclear umbrella.” Nuclear weapons “deter” other nations from initiating hostile actions.

ULTIMATE FACTS: Nuclear weapons cannot and must not ever be used since it is likely that any use against another nuclear-armed nation or a nation protected by another nation's nuclear umbrella would most likely result in an uncontrollable, full-scale nuclear exchange that would result in millions of deaths (both immediate and short-term); countless long-term illnesses and deaths from radioactive contamination of the air, soil and water; and billions of deaths due to starvation in what is known as nuclear winter.

CURRENT US NUCLEAR FORCES: The US maintains a stockpile of approximately 3,708 warheads. The total number of U.S. nuclear warheads are now estimated to include approximately 1,770 deployed warheads and 1,938 reserved for operational forces. Those warheads are deployed on approximately 400 land-based missiles in silos across Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska and Colorado; 14 ballistic missile submarines (with approximately 920 total warheads deployed); large bombers (B52 and B2 Spirit; approximately 300 bombs); and smaller aircraft (approximately 200 smaller yield bombs) based in various European countries. The explosive yields of the larger “strategic” warheads range from 90 to 455 kilotons. In contrast the yields of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs were approximately 15 and 21 kilotons respectively. Today's weapons are vastly more devastating.

FUTURE US NUCLEAR FORCES: The US is moving forward rapidly on an across-the-board modernization program that includes a new generation of ballistic missile submarines (called the Columbia Class) and land-based missiles (called Sentinel); and a new nuclear-capable bomber (the B-21 Raider). A new nuclear warhead (the W93) for the Columbia Class submarines is already in the planning stages.

COSTS OF FUTURE FORCES: Columbia Class submarine – cost to build 12 subs: \$112 billion; Sentinel missile - cost to build 659 missiles: \$95 billion; B-21 Raider - cost to build 100 bombers: \$69 billion to build. There will be additional costs, including new warheads; extensive government infrastructure around the US that conducts research, develops, builds and maintains warheads; and lifecycle costs for the weapons and weapon delivery systems! Note that the costs cited above are estimates; final costs will likely be higher than estimates. Total costs for US nuclear weapon “modernization” will ultimately be at least a \$1 trillion.

WHY IS THE US “MODERNIZING”? The US government claims it needs to build up its nuclear forces to counter emerging threats from China, Russia, North Korea and Iran. Despite calls for transparency of adversaries' nuclear arsenals, nuclear secrecy in the US has increased. As the only nation state to have used nuclear weapons against another, the US has a moral duty to lead other nations to abolish them.

FINAL THOUGHTS: It has not been because the danger posed by nuclear weapons has “deterred” nations from waging nuclear war. Instead, it has been thanks to the decades-long nuclear disarmament movement that has never gone away. Far beyond the financial costs and human costs, for people of faith killing is simply wrong, and nuclear weapons, which are omnicidal by design, are an abomination. And, as the late Fr. Richard McSorley said, “The taproot of violence in our society today is our intent to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison. Until we squarely face the questions of our consent to use nuclear weapons, any hope of large scale improvement of public morality is doomed to failure.” We as citizens must demand that our government discontinue its reliance on nuclear weapons as tools of foreign policy and instead lead the way toward disarmament.

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