

Renounce nuclear weapons

Mary Ann McGivern | Mar. 5, 2014 NCR Today

[In February I reported](#) [1] on the Department of Defense and proposed cuts in its budget. NCR readers responded vigorously about military goals, social needs, job creation and security. So I thought this Lent I would look more closely at some of the issues raised.

Where to begin? Nuclear weapons.

The U.S. and Russia each have a few less than 5,000 missiles armed with nuclear bombs and aimed at each other. China, France, England and Israel have many fewer nukes, but they too have long-range delivery capabilities. India, Pakistan and North Korea round out the nuclear club membership -- but without the long-range missiles.

Possession of these weapons has been a status symbol. Libyan dictator Muammar Gadhafi tried to assert new leadership by renouncing his weapons. But he came to a bad end, reducing the likelihood that Pakistan, India or North Korea would follow suit.

A real fear is that the military officers in Pakistan don't realize the damage their weapons can do or what they would suffer if India retaliated. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un may also think his country would be unscathed by a nuclear detonation in the south. They suffer from a failure of imagination. And make no mistake, a single explosion on the other side of the world would impact us in the United States.

Over the past 60 years, the U.S. and Russia have survived dozens of errors, from flocks of geese to a hammer dropping down a silo and triggering an alert. But still our missiles are pointed at each other, forever on alert. We too suffer from a failure of imagination.

President Barack Obama moved early in his presidency to gain control of nuclear arms and weaponized uranium scattered in the former Soviet Union. Quietly, without arrogance, he worked with Putin and Medvedev to destroy most of this material. We and Russia reduced our arsenals from 10,000 down to 5,000 nukes and promised deeper cuts. But Congress extracted a heavy price for the deal -- \$80 billion in modernization programs at the U.S. nuclear weapons complexes and another \$100 billion to be spent by the Navy and Air Force to modernize delivery systems. This money has mostly not been spent, a reason for Republican animosity toward Obama. The Budget Control Act of 2011 imposes significant fiscal constraints.

Having said all that, it remains true that we have no use for these weapons. If Russia deployed against us, confusing yet another flock of geese for a nuclear warhead, do we really want to return fire? No country has anything to gain by using nuclear weapons. If China bombed us, for example, not only would the atmosphere be poisoned, our destruction would be their loss of an economic partner.

It's a fool's game, an appropriate place to ask: What would Jesus do?

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