

## Nuclear Weapons On Hair Trigger Alert

By Polly Mann



*The Instruments of Human Sustenance (Humani Victus Instrumenta). Etching, 16th cen. Italy. Humanity is inseparable from its tools, which can be invented to destroy life—or to create things for our benefit instead.*

It's a subject presidential hopefuls are not willing to talk about because the question cannot be answered without an examination—perhaps denunciation—of U.S. nuclear policy. (If there is an exception of one candidate making a statement, you will need to discover it for yourself.) The truth is, of course, that the use of nuclear weapons could be the beginning of the end of all life on earth.

Despite his initial public commitment to build a nuclear weapons-free world, what the President has proposed would cost \$1 trillion over 30 years to “modernize” the U.S. nuclear arsenal, according to the Arms Control Association (cost from three

independent estimates). And here's what the Union for Concerned Scientists' Winter 2016 "Final Analysis" report says about the Obama administration's plan to extend the life of the U.S. nuclear stockpile: "What we don't agree with is the administration's plan for a suite of new nuclear warheads—which would undermine the treaty." In other words, "modernizing" would undermine Obama's attempt to get the U.S. Senate to finally ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Worldwide nine nations possess more than 15,000 nuclear weapons: the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. Most of the nuclear weapons are many times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945.

However, this spring U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, along with foreign ministers from France, Germany, Italy, Britain, Canada, and Japan, visited Hiroshima during a Group of Seven (G-7) gathering. President Obama may come to Hiroshima in May and offer respect for the bombing victims, as well, but no U.S. apologies have been or are expected. Still, it is widely reported that the top western officials' visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum, dedicated to remembrance of the bombing, has sparked hopes among people in Japan for nuclear disarmament amid rising tensions between China and the U.S. over maritime control in the Asia Pacific. (In response to the increased U.S. presence in the region, China is now said to be considering placing its nuclear weapons on hair trigger alert.)

Tensions are also high between the U.S. and nuclear-armed Russia, which both maintain nuclear weapons on high-alert status—ready to be launched within minutes of a warning. A single nuclear warhead, if detonated on a large city, could kill millions of people, with the effects persisting for decades.

David Andersen, a retired engineer in Minneapolis, is incredulous at the need for the U.S. to maintain twelve nuclear aircraft carriers when two would be enough to support large-scale, long-term invasions from the sea. He has an idea for how to put U.S. nuclear carriers to better use: They could be modified to rescue refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, he pointed out, such carriers were used for civilian disaster relief in Indonesia and Haiti.

John LaForge, of Nukewatch, Wisconsin, co-editor of Nuclear Heartland, Revised, a new book about the land-based Minuteman III missiles (ICBMs), commented:

High-level military and civilian authorities have called for the complete elimination of the remaining 450 land-based ICBMs. They include Col. B. Chance Saltzman, chief of the U.S. Air Force's Strategic Plans and Policy Division (2010); Gen. James Cartwright, former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a commission report signed by Senator and future Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel (2012); and Secretary of Defense (1994-1997) William Perry, who said Dec. 3, 2015, 'ICBMS aren't necessary... they're not needed.



David Krieger, of the Nuclear Peace Foundation, summed the situation up at the end of last year in a Truthout opinion piece:

The mere possession of nuclear weapons and the prestige in the international community associated with such is an inducement to nuclear proliferation. . . Where is the humanity in seeking to devote resources to improving nuclear weaponry and delivery systems WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY HUMAN NEEDS THAT ARE GOING UNFULFILLED?... Instead of relying on nuclear deterrence and pursuing nuclear arsenals, we need to press our political leaders to fulfill our moral and legal obligations to negotiate in good faith for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. That is, we need to break free of our acidic complacency and commit ourselves to achieving a nuclear zero world.

Instead of modernizing our nuclear warheads, we could be using scientific skills and human ingenuity for the benefit of humanity.

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness and a regular contributor and columnist for the WAMM newsletter.