

4-26-2019

## **Blind devotion to nuclear deterrence: Our ancestors left a legacy of magnificent cathedrals while we'll leave behind nuclear weapons**

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### **Citation of this paper:**

Simpson, Erika, "Blind devotion to nuclear deterrence: Our ancestors left a legacy of magnificent cathedrals while we'll leave behind nuclear weapons" (2019). *Political Science Publications*. 224.  
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/224>

# Simpson: Blind devotion to nuclear deterrence

Our ancestors left a legacy of magnificent cathedrals, while we'll leave behind nuclear weapons

**ERIKA SIMPSON, SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA NEWS**

Updated: April 26, 2019



**Getty Images**

The cost of rebuilding Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral cannot be yet estimated, but more than a billion euros (\$1.5 billion) has been pledged from all over the world to resurrect the centuries-old church.

Generations hence, what will the descendants of our civilization inherit from us and similarly cherish?

Our generation is spending billions on nuclear missiles, pointing to the sky worshipping the doctrine of deterrence. According to the Nuclear Weapons Cost Study released by Global Zero in June 2011, global annual expenditure on nuclear weapons amounted to US\$105 billion annually, or \$12 million an hour.

Nuclear force modernization in the U.S. will cost approximately \$30 billion over the next 10 years, and the Trump administration is budgeting \$10 billion more for nuclear interceptors designed to fly through space as part of its new U.S. Space Force.

According to Stephen Schwartz, author of *Atomic Audit: The Cost and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940*, “the nuclear weapons program has cost an estimated US\$8.7 trillion (in inflation-adjusted 2010 dollars) since 1940.” (In comparison, Canada’s GDP in 2017 was US\$1.653 trillion.)

The United Kingdom is also intent on retaining its Trident nuclear-armed submarines, even if Scotland were to choose independence in the aftermath of Brexit. It seems to expect an independent Scotland to continue to dock the fleet, although the Scots want to stay in Europe and possibly become nuclear-free.

Meanwhile France, with the world’s third-largest nuclear weapons arsenal, is spending billions on its independent nuclear striking force. The think-tank Observatory of Armament estimates the country’s 300 warheads — deployed on submarine-launched ballistic missiles and fighter aircraft — cost 357 billion euros (\$536 billion) between 1945 and 2010.

The human race is spending billions on killing machines that disregard the difference between civilians and fighting soldiers and that, if used, would send the planet into another ice age.

Even if India and Pakistan used only 100 small-scale tactical weapons in a fight over Kashmir, world temperatures would plummet over two weeks, and global famine, economic collapse and the death of billions of humans and other species would result.

We are at two minutes to midnight — midnight being the end of the world and the extinction of all humans and species — according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’ esteemed board of scientists and experts that set up the Doomsday Clock. Yet there are still those who steadfastly believe nuclear weapons are a deterrent that will never be used, and a nuclear war will never be fought.

They believe nuclear weapons are essential and “core capabilities” for the military that must be maintained and never parted with. Indeed, they are the first to argue that without nuclear weapons Europe would descend into conventional war once again — an unprovable but devoutly believed creed, much like people in the Middle Ages fervently believed Jesus’s mother Mary (the Notre Dame after whom the Paris’s cathedral is named) was a virgin.

At least those devotees built cathedrals. This generation’s nuclear priesthood is intent on building phallic symbols loaded with nuclear fallout.

It is doubtful our descendants will rush to donate money to rebuild nuclear weapons in the year 2875 AD, like donors flock now to rebuild a cathedral first conceived of in 1163 AD. But then

again, 856 years from now, nobody could be around, because the world's nuclear arsenals continue to be controlled by irrational men.

U.S. President Donald Trump is one of those who has the sole authority to press the nuclear button. Another is Vladimir Putin, for all intents and purposes the dictator of Russia who invaded Crimea and captured the peninsula from Ukraine. Last month, another of them, China's President Xi Jinping, ensured he can remain in power for life. And North Korea's Kim Jong-Un ordered his uncle and ex-girlfriend shot, and arranged for the assassination of his half-brother.

Yet we continue to allow these mad men sole authority over nuclear weapons that could incinerate us all.

Unlike peasants in the Middle Ages, we need to question the sovereign authority of leaders so that the fruit of our labours is spent on noble legacies, like new generations of smartphones, clean water for all, the robot in your car, new vaccines to eliminate deadly diseases, and most importantly, the UN's new Sustainable Development Goals that include ending world poverty among the 17 worthy aspirations.

*Erika Simpson is an associate professor of international politics at Western University and the author of NATO and the Bomb. This is an excerpt from her address at UN headquarters to be given on May 7 on a panel with U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons Guy B. Roberts, formerly NATO's deputy assistant secretary general for weapons of mass destruction policy and director for nuclear deterrence policy.*