



## A Reflection from Bishop Swing

### Rip Van Winkle And Nuclear Weapons

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Twenty years went by as Rip Van Winkle slept through the Revolutionary War. When he woke up, most everything had changed. He was forced to live in a new world.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the public tended to take a 60 year nap, only to wake up in the Ukraine crisis to discover that we were back to the terror of possible extinction for the human race.

Rip drank too much booze and fell asleep. On the other hand, we took too much comfort in the doctrine of deterrence and then snoozed. Actually deterrence has been a good thing. It promised that if our adversary were to annihilate us, we, at the same time, would annihilate our adversary (MAD or mutually assured destruction). Both sides (Russian and America) did arm themselves, nobody flinched and from 1945 till now, neither country, nor the seven other such armed counties, used a nuclear weapon in combat. Truly a commendable achievement, especially considering that the number of warheads worldwide shrank by almost three fourths.

The weakness of MAD is the possibility of a leader of a nuclear armed country going mad. Over 90% of all the nuclear warheads in the world are in the hands of two people, the President of the United States and the President of Russia. Life on the planet Earth could well come down to the psychological and moral sanity of two human beings. Should one of them become unhinged, we shutter to imagine.

Is Putin unhinged? I doubt it. Evil but not crazy! Will Putin unleash his entire nuclear arsenal on the world? I doubt it. But what if he orders a tactical nuclear strike in Ukraine or a regional nuclear weapon? Could such a shot be like the bullet that killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 and eventually led to 40 million deaths? A frightening prospect.

Awaken from slumber, the world is trying to catch up to what has happened with nuclear weapons. Two camps form. One camp trusts that the nine nuclear weapon nations, with over 13,000 warheads, will forever behave rationally and responsibly. The other camp believes that imperfect human beings should not have access to such weapons. Who do you trust? With our time potentially measured, we need to choose. Ukraine is our wake-up call.

As for me, I believe that human life and all life on the planet has a better chance with checks and balances than trusting in the perfect nature of one or two leaders. Trusting Putin in Ukraine is a nightmare with ultimate dimensions.

+ Rt. Rev. William E. Swing

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