

# Risks and Opportunities to Reduce the Threat of Nuclear Weapons in the Trump Era

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By Jeanne McKnight

While December is usually the time to reflect on what has happened in the past year, noted **President Cathy** Gibson as she called the November 30 meeting to order, “We are going to look forward to an important part of foreign policy”— nuclear weapons. The opportunity to hear from such distinguished speakers as global security expert Joe Cirincione is part of what makes Seattle #4 a great club—and worthy of the recruiting effort we would be hearing about a bit later in the program.



**George Twiss** (celebrating his birthday) gave the invocation, followed by Past **President Don Kraft**, who gave a moving tribute to Seattle #4 legend, the late **Joseph R. (Joe) James**, who passed away on November 17: “Joe, standing at 5’2”, was a giant of a man,” he observed, adding that Joe “showed us how to live a life of service above self.” He reminded us of Joe James’ legacy as founder of the Keekwulees some 64 years ago, and who supported the founding of the Medic One Program. After a moment of silence to remember this “giant” from our Club’s history, **Patrick Carter** and **David Woodward** then introduced visiting Rotarians and guests, respectively. **Connie Miller** introduced us to our newest member, **Kathleen Fondren**.

**Kim Moore** and **Ken Grant** then led the crowd in a rousing 94<sup>th</sup> Birthday Tribute to **Art Mazzola**. **Bernie Griffin** then gave us a sneak preview of the upcoming

Holiday Party (December 14), which will, as usual, feature the incredibly talented cast of the Fifth Avenue Theater.

Intrigue was next on the program, as Special Agent **Diankha Linear** launched a new membership initiative, “Mission Possible: Each One Reach One.” She encouraged all of us to take responsibility for recruiting new members—and to jot down the names of people who would help strengthen our Club and follow the Mission Possible protocol: Invite. Connect. Engage.

**President Cathy** then introduced the main program speaker, Joe Cirincione, President of the Washington, DC-based Ploughshares Fund <http://www.ploughshares.org/>, a global security foundation that gives grants to people working on reducing nuclear threats.

Cirincione, author of the book, *Nuclear Nightmares: Securing the World Before It Is Too Late*, served as a staff



member of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Government Operations, and is a member of Secretary of State John Kerry's International Security Advisory Board and the Council on Foreign Relations. He acknowledged one of his board members, John Hoyt, Partner in the Seattle office of Pyramid Communications, and set the stage for his talk by noting that the recent Presidential election made it clear that he "should be completely out of the prediction business." Nevertheless, Cirincione opened his talk by making some predictions of his own about how the Trump Administration will likely act regarding our nation's nuclear policy: "Every indication is that you are going to see big change," he said.



What will that change look like? Cirincione outlined three risks and three opportunities that we might expect to see:

**Risk #1:** Temperament. The President has sole authority to launch nuclear weapons. "Donald Trump will soon be followed everywhere he goes by a military officer carrying the nuclear codes," said Cirincione. "It is his decision and his alone on firing our nuclear weapons. They can be launched within four minutes of his order." Why do we still have such a dangerous system? "It is a Cold War relic," Cirincione pointed out, adding: "What reason is there to vest this decision in one person?"

**Risk #2:** Donald Trump could encourage other countries to get nuclear weapons. There is a view out there that having more countries with nuclear weapons is a good thing: "We could be in uncharted territory," either encouraged by mistake or intentional statement.

**Risk #3:** Donald Trump variously promised to dismantle, renegotiate, or enforce the Iran Nuclear Agreement. "If he withdraws, this would throw [everything] into disarray."

Cirincione asserted that "The sanctions worked because they were global." But, "If we tear up that deal, our allies will not follow us."

However, Cirincione noted, "Since this is the season of hope, here are three opportunities" with the new Administration:

**Opportunity #1:** As President, Donald Trump (as he has promised time and again) could pursue his stated desire to improve relations with Russia (i.e., Vladimir Putin), a stand from which he has "never wavered." In fact, Cirincione mused, "they [Putin and Trump] clearly have a bit of a *bromance* going on."

Why is this relationship important? Cirincione pointed out that, of the 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world, 95 percent are owned by the United States and Russia. In addition, there are over 1,300 nuclear weapons in Washington State, at the Kitsap Naval Base, a fact that prompted

Cirincione to observe: “If Washington state were to leave the Union, we would be the third largest nuclear power in the world.”

Another observation in the “opportunity” category: For basic political reasons, Cirincione asserted, “Only Republican presidents have made significant reductions in nuclear arms.” So it is possible that “Trump could substantially reduce nuclear tensions in the world.”

**Opportunity #2:** This would involve North Korea, with Donald Trump talking with Kim Jong-un. “If we don’t slow [them] within three years, they may be unstoppable,” he observed. For this reason, “A deal is possible” with North Korea—to include “freezing rather than a rolling back program.” Cirincione speculated that there could be a private meeting to see what the parameters of a deal could be.

**Opportunity #3:** Donald Trump could embrace the Iran deal. There is a growing consensus from national security leaders, including former opponents of the deal, that the current Iran deal “should be kept.”

“Now that politics are over,” Cirincione said, “people realize that this is a good deal when it is not surrounded by the politics.”

Cirincione urged everyone to make your voice heard on these important issues. Given the national stature of our elected officials—Senators Murray and Cantwell, and Representative Adam Smith (ranking House member)—all need to hear from us: “They need to hear from you—what you want and what you do not.”

After a lively question and answer session that touched on aging nuclear weapons that are “aging out,” to fears about Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities, to the notion of what happens if terrorist groups gain access to nuclear weapons to the nuts and bolts of getting in touch with our representatives, **President Cathy** invited Rotarians to stay after the program to talk further with Cirincione.

Her call to action: Remember “Mission Possible” and reach out to prospective new members; and, following the suggestion of the speaker, reach out to your elected representatives. “Make your voice heard.”

