

Reduce the Threat of Nuclear Weapons

Should nuclear weapons ever be used again, the risks of catastrophic escalation would be great. Should one nuclear attack lead to others, a nuclear winter could ensue, [risking billions of casualties and a global environmental crisis](#).¹ As President Ronald Reagan once said, “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

We Cannot Afford a New Nuclear Arms Race

- According to [Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\)](#),² the nuclear weapons spending spree currently underway is projected to cost taxpayers upwards of \$1.2 trillion (or \$1.7 trillion adjusted for inflation) over the next thirty years.
- Instead of spending taxpayer dollars on new nuclear weapons that increase the threat of nuclear war, Congress should increase investments in programs that can reduce the nuclear threat, such as nonproliferation programs and the State Department.
- Money saved by forgoing another costly nuclear arms race could also go towards addressing other serious security threats from cyber attacks to climate change, or towards supporting critical human needs like healthcare, housing, education, and more.
- Congress and the administration should work to prevent the emergence of a dangerous new nuclear arms race by refusing to participate in one.

Adopting a No-First-Use Policy Would Promote Stability, Reduce Risk

- Military leaders who have been in charge of our nuclear forces such as General James E. Cartwright [argue that there is no need for this policy](#)³ that cannot be addressed by economic, diplomatic and conventional tools.
- As [ten Senators wrote to President Obama in 2016](#),⁴ a first use policy “exacerbates mutual fears of surprise attack, putting pressure on other nuclear-armed states to keep their arsenals on high-alert and increasing the risk of unintended nuclear war.”
- Congress reassuring the world that the U.S. will not launch a nuclear first strike on the whim of one person would significantly reduce the risks of nuclear proliferation and war.

Making Nuclear Weapons “More Usable” Increases Risk

- The Trump administration’s 2018 Nuclear Posture Review appeared to expand the list of scenarios in which the U.S. might use nuclear weapons first to include responding to “significant non-nuclear strategic attacks.” When asked to expand on that, [Undersecretary of Defense for Policy John Rood explained](#)⁵ that this could include responding to biological, chemical, and cyber attacks, as well as large-scale conventional attacks.
- Low-yield nuclear weapons are [designed to be “more usable,”](#)⁶ a misguided goal for any nuclear weapon. The term “low-yield” is also misleading, as their yields would be comparable to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which killed hundreds of thousands of people. Low-yield nuclear weapons also pose a serious risk of escalation.
- Congress and the administration should work to reduce the scenarios in which nuclear weapons might be used, not to expand them.

1 Germanos, Andrea, *Nuclear War Could Mean ‘Extinction of the Human Race’*, Common Dreams, Dec 10, 2013

2 *Approaches for Managing the Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2017 to 2046*, Congressional Budget Office, October, 2017

3 Cartwright, James, and Bruce Blair, *End the First-Use Policy for Nuclear Weapons*, NY Times, August 14, 2016

4 Markey, Edward, et al., *Letter to President Obama on Nuclear Weapons*, United States Senate, July 20, 2016

5 *News Briefing on the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review*, U.S. Department of Defense, February 2, 2018

6 Kimball, Daryl, *New, ‘More Usable’ Nukes? No, Thanks*, Arms Control Today, July/August 2017

Nuclear Arms Control Agreements Make Us Safer

- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Agreement, is still verifiably blocking all of Iran's potential pathways to a nuclear bomb. [Over 50 retired generals and diplomats](#)⁷ called for the U.S. to reenter the agreement as soon as possible in a February 2019 statement.
- The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty decommissioned an entire class of particularly destabilizing nuclear weapons. President Trump's decision to withdraw from the treaty rather than pursuing serious diplomacy to address concerns on both sides risks the revival of this class of arms, and throws more fuel on the emerging nuclear arms race.
- The New START Treaty puts caps on the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons the U.S. and Russia can maintain, and gives the U.S. access to Russia's nuclear program. As [seven former commanders of U.S. strategic nuclear forces wrote](#)⁸ in support of the New START Treaty's ratification, "we will understand Russian strategic forces much better with this treaty than would be the case without it." The administration should work with Russia to renew this critical treaty before it expires in 2021.
- The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons enjoys the support of a majority of the world's nations. The U.S. should support this treaty and take steps in coordination with other nuclear-armed nations to come into compliance with it.

Steps Members of Congress Can Take

- **Co-sponsor the *Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act*, S. 200 introduced by Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA), or H.R. 669 introduced by Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA)** to prohibit the president from launching a nuclear first strike without a declaration of war from Congress that expressly authorizes such a strike.
- **Co-sponsor S. 272 introduced by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, or H.R. 921 introduced by Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA)**, to establish a no-first-use policy regarding nuclear weapons.
- **Co-sponsor the *Hold the LYNE Act*, S. 401 introduced by Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA), or H.R. 1086 introduced by Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA)** to prohibit the research and development, production, and deployment of the Trident D5 low-yield nuclear warhead.
- **Co-sponsor S. 312 introduced by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), or H.R. 1249 introduced by Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI)**, to block funding for nuclear weapons banned by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
- **Co-sponsor S. 845 introduced by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ)** calling for the extension of the New START Treaty.
- **Become an original co-sponsor of the *Smarter Approaches to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act*** to cut nuclear weapons spending and block destabilizing expansions to our nuclear arsenal and weapons capabilities. Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) will introduce a Senate version, and a House bill will follow.
- **Make statements** opposing the \$1.7 trillion plus (adjusted for inflation) nuclear weapons spending spree.
- **Make statements** supporting international arms control agreements including the Iran Nuclear Agreement, the INF Treaty, the New START Treaty, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- **Support increased funding for nonproliferation programs** that address the threats of nuclear terrorism and loose nuclear materials.

⁷ Rear Admiral Sandy Adams, USN (Retired) et al., *The United States should reenter the Iran Nuclear Deal*, The American College of National Security Leaders, February 28, 2019

⁸ General Larry Welch et al., *Letter to Senator Carl Levin et al.*, July 14, 2010