

Reduce the Nuclear Weapons Threat Before It's Too Late

The time for action is now. If nuclear weapons are ever used again, a dangerous escalation is likely to follow. A nuclear winter could ensue, [risking billions of casualties and a global environmental crisis](#).¹ The Biden administration, supported by allies in Congress, should explicitly recommit to the vision of a nuclear weapons free world that President Obama articulated early in his presidency. The administration and Congress should back up this renewed commitment by dramatically reducing both spending on nuclear weapons and the salience of nuclear weapons in U.S. security policy. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine cries out for diplomatic intervention not only to end that atrocity, but also to prevent possible escalation up to and including nuclear war. Both countries have said bilateral nuclear arms reduction talks should still be pursued regardless of the war, but with no progress at this time.

Avoiding a New Nuclear Arms Race and Wasteful Nuclear Spending Allows Smarter Spending on Human Needs

Money saved by forgoing another costly nuclear arms race could also go toward addressing other serious security threats from the coronavirus and future pandemics to climate change; and toward supporting critical human needs like health care, unemployment programs, housing, education, and more.

- The Biden administration must bring sanity to nuclear weapons spending by beginning to cut the planned \$1.2 trillion (\$1.7 T adjusted for inflation) for nuclear weapons over the next thirty years. Costs are based on a 2017 estimate by the [Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\)](#).²
- The need for smart cuts is urgent: the Departments of Defense and Energy are already outspending those estimates, which are increasing as the program continues to ramp up. A [May 2021 CBO report](#)³ projects a 28% increase in spending on nuclear weapons over its last estimate from just two years prior. Costs through the year 2030 would total \$634 billion.
- Instead of new nuclear weapons spending that increases the threat of nuclear war, Congress should invest in reducing nuclear threats through smart nonproliferation science and diplomacy.

New Nuclear Weapons Are Destabilizing and Dangerous

- Plans for a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) carrying nuclear warheads are underway. Dubbed the Sentinel, or more properly the Money Pit Missile, this exorbitant boondoggle is meant to replace the Minuteman III missiles housed in silos in Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Montana and North Dakota. And it comes with an estimated [price tag of \\$264 billion](#)⁴ that's sure to go up even higher. Northrop Grumman, the main contractor, has a history of graft, influence buying and cost overruns; there are already concerns flight testing of the new missile scheduled for later this year may be delayed, and questions about subsidies from Utah taxpayers to Northrop Grumman, which built a new headquarters and manufacturing facility in the state, are being raised.
- Polling by the Federation of American Scientists from fall of 2020 found that 60% of registered voters [support finding an alternative](#)⁵ to the costly and dangerous Sentinel program.
- Low-yield nuclear weapons are [designed to be "more usable,"](#)⁶ a reckless goal for nuclear weapons. The term "low-yield" is also misleading, as 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.

- Congress is debating a [new nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile](#)⁷ (SLCM-N), despite President Biden's opposition to it on the campaign trail and in his budget requests. In fact, the Biden administration's 2022 Nuclear Posture Review policy review canceled the SLCM-N, declaring it "no longer necessary." Additionally, the risk of nuclear escalation also increases with such a missile, as it can carry a conventional or nuclear warhead; a potential adversary wouldn't know which one was on the incoming missile. Congress should support a permanent cancellation of this unnecessary and provocative weapon.
- Plans to aggressively expand production of plutonium "pits" — the explosive triggers for thermonuclear weapons — are costly, environmentally dangerous, and contrary to efforts to control nuclear weapons proliferation.

Adopting a No-First-Use Policy Would Keep Our Communities Safer

- Military leaders such as General James E. Cartwright, who was in charge of our nuclear forces, argue [there is no need for a policy of first use of nuclear weapons](#)⁸ because modern threats can all be addressed by the U.S.'s economic, diplomatic, and conventional tools.
- Senators led by Edward Markey (D-MA) pressed the Biden Administration to adopt a No First Use policy and other changes to reduce nuclear dangers in the Nuclear Posture Review, released last year after a long delay. None of the common sense steps were adopted.

Steps Members of Congress Can Take

- **Support the Biden administration's planned cancellation** of the new destabilizing nuclear-armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N). **Vote against any efforts** to restore funding for the SLCM-N as happened in FY 2023.
- **Cosponsor [S.1754](#) or [H.R.3472](#), the SANE Act, introduced by Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)** to reduce spending on nuclear weapons and related defense spending and to prohibit the procurement and deployment of low-yield nuclear warheads. The bill would rein in explosive, escalatory, and unnecessary spending in U.S. nuclear weapons programs.
- **In the House, cosponsor [H.Res.77](#), introduced by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA)**, to embrace the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. **In the Senate, introduce and support** a similar effort.
- **Cosponsor [S.1186](#) or [H.R.669](#), Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2023, introduced by Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA)** to prohibit federal funds from allowing a first-use nuclear strike unless Congress expressly authorizes such a strike pursuant to a declaration of war.
- **In the House, cosponsor [H.R.2775](#), the Nuclear Weapons Abolition and Economic Conversion Act of 2023, introduced by Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)**. Also known as "Warheads to Windmills," the bill seeks to convert nuclear weapons industry resources and personnel to purposes relating to addressing the climate crisis. **In the Senate, introduce and support** a similar effort.
- **Cosponsor [S.1499](#) or [H.R.3154](#), the Hastening Arms Limitation Talks (HALT) Act, introduced by Sen. Markey (D-MA) and Rep. McGovern (D-MA)**. The bill would increase critical nonproliferation measures to reduce nuclear risks at a dangerous time.

¹ Baum, Seth, *The Risk of Nuclear Winter*, Federation of American Scientists, May 29, 2015

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

³ *Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2021 to 2030*, Congressional Budget Office, May 2021

⁴ Sirota, Sara, *Pentagon estimates new ICBM system to cost \$264 billion over life cycle*, Inside Defense, October 7, 2020

⁵ Mehta, Aaron, *Majority of voters support ICBM replacement alternatives, new poll finds*, Defense News, February 5, 2021

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

⁷ Montgomery, Monica and Kingston Reif, *Biden Should Sink This Proposed Nuclear Weapon*, Defense One, April 19, 2021

⁸ Cartwright, James, and Bruce Blair, *End the First-Use Policy for Nuclear Weapons*, NY Times, August 14, 2016