

Restoring U.S. Leadership to Eliminate Nuclear Threats

A Message to the Presidential Transition Team from the Nuclear Disarmament Community

Nov. 19, 2020

Just as dramatic action is needed to combat climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, immediate, smart, and bold American leadership is required to reduce the threat of nuclear catastrophe and put us on a path to the peace and security of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We are heartened by President-Elect Biden's lifelong engagement on nuclear weapons-related security issues and his commitment to effective arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament.

We, as individuals and on behalf of many organizations representing millions of members and supporters, are prepared to help the new administration take bold steps to restore American leadership to reduce nuclear dangers, including in the following key areas.

Extend New START and Pursue Deeper Nuclear Reductions

The Trump administration has abandoned or put at risk key nuclear arms control agreements that have kept the peace.

- Clearly, one of the new administration's first priorities must be to reach agreement with Russia to extend New START for five years without conditions before Feb. 5, 2021. Ahead of inauguration day, the president-elect's team should publicly express their interest in a five-year extension and name a special representative who will be prepared to begin work with Russian counterparts on day one.
- Upon extending New START, the new administration should announce it will seek to engage Russia in talks on follow-on nuclear arms reduction agreements. These agreements, which need not take a single form, should aim to set significantly lower verifiable limits on U.S. and Russian strategic delivery systems and warheads and also address nonstrategic nuclear warheads; and deal with the offense-defense relationship and long-range conventional and dual-capable weapons, including those formerly banned by the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and hypersonic glide vehicles.

We encourage the new administration to pursue a pledge from the other nuclear-armed states to freeze the size of their nuclear stockpiles so long as the United States and Russia pursue deeper verifiable reductions in their arsenals.

Adopt Saner and Safer Nuclear Policies

The new administration has an historic opportunity to reduce the growing risk of nuclear catastrophe by reversing the Trump administration's expansion of the role of nuclear weapons and changing outdated and dangerously permissive U.S. nuclear use policies.

As Vice-President Biden said in Jan. 2017, *"Given our non-nuclear capabilities and the nature of today's threats—it's hard to envision a plausible scenario in which the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be necessary. Or make sense."*

- We urge a President Biden to state that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack and to formally adopt a no first use policy and encourage all other nuclear-armed states to adopt a similar approach.

- We also urge the new administration to abandon the option to launch U.S. nuclear forces upon warning of an attack but before nuclear detonations on U.S. soil have been confirmed. This posture unnecessarily rushes presidential decisions and increases the risk of catastrophic miscalculation. Given that the United States retains a large and highly survivable sea-based nuclear force, this strategy is unnecessary to deter nuclear attack.

Eliminate Excessive and Dangerous Nuclear Weapons Spending

The current U.S. nuclear weapons sustainment and modernization program, which is due to cost taxpayers at least \$1.5 trillion and possibly \$2 trillion in coming decades, exceeds what is necessary to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent and will siphon funds away from other more pressing needs. In addition, some new and proposed systems are destabilizing and redundant.

- We strongly urge the new administration to significantly reduce excessive U.S. nuclear force structure and spending on nuclear weapons through a top-to-bottom review that is consistent with a new Biden administration strategy to sharply reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons.
- One key place to start is to immediately pause funding for a new ICBM system via the Ground-based Strategic Deterrent program.
- We strongly urge the new administration to reverse the Trump administration's fielding of a new low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) warhead (the W76-2), drop the proposal to build a sea-launched nuclear cruise missile (SLCM-N), and halt the new air-launched nuclear-armed cruise missile (LRSO) program.
- We strongly urge the new administration to forgo plans to build a new ICBM warhead (W87-1) and develop a new SLBM warhead (W93), and scale-back the current plan to expand the production of plutonium pits.

Several of our organizations have developed detailed [alternative policy](#) and [budget proposals](#) to delay, reduce, or cancel redundant systems and produce scores of billions of dollars of savings that could be redirected to meet higher priority human and national security needs. Such priorities include pandemic response, combating climate change, properly funding environmental remediation at nuclear weapons complex sites, extending and expanding the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), and other 21st century military spending priorities.

Build Global Support for Nonproliferation and Disarmament

Renewed and active U.S. leadership is essential to shore-up and strengthen the global nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament architecture.

- **NPT:** We urge the new administration to work constructively with other countries to build majority support at the 10th Review Conference for the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) for a plan of action that reaffirms previous NPT commitments and obligations and outlines concrete steps that would advance Article VI disarmament goals.
- **CTBT:** We urge the new administration to reaffirm support for U.S. ratification and entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and to reinforce the global taboo on nuclear testing. It can start by engaging with Russia and China on confidence-building steps to ensure full compliance with the treaty's zero-yield standard and seeking to reaffirm P5 support for the zero-yield prohibition.
- **TPNW:** On January 22 the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) will enter into force. It is well known that United States is not ready to support the TPNW, but

we encourage the new administration to recognize that the TPNW is a good faith effort by the majority of states to eliminate the nuclear danger and build up the legal framework for the elimination of nuclear weapons—the common goal of all nations.

- To demonstrate the seriousness of the U.S. government’s commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons, we strongly urge the new administration to develop a comprehensive plan that outlines the many steps that would be necessary to achieve that goal and describes what the United States is prepared to do to implement those steps.
- In order to bolster the United States diplomatic and technical capacity to execute this robust program of action, we urge the new administration to restore and significantly augment the depleted staff within the State Department’s “T” family of bureaus, and also consider putting the new Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, or another high-level official, in the role of special advisor to the President.

Taken together, these policies and actions will restore U.S. leadership and credibility, build greater global cooperation, and put us in a better position to prevent the spread or use of nuclear weapons, including efforts to restore compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and advance follow-on negotiations to address Iran’s nuclear and missile capabilities in the future, as well as diplomacy with North Korea on a step-for-step plan for peace and denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

Over the 75-year history of the nuclear age, millions of people in the United States and around the world, have stood up to demand meaningful leadership to halt, reduce, and eliminate the threats posed by nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons testing, and nuclear war.

We look forward to working with the new administration to advance these and other initiatives to reduce the nuclear danger.

Sincerely,

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