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# United States Senate

December 22, 2016

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The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President-elect of the United States  
Trump Tower  
725 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Mr. President-elect:

As the Commander-in-Chief of one of the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, you will soon inherit the responsibility of reducing the risk of global nuclear war. Your inauguration will occur at a time of growing military tensions with other nuclear powers, and as escalating U.S. nuclear weapons spending puts considerable strains on the federal budget. Calling to “expand [our] nuclear capabilities,” as you recently did,<sup>1</sup> would only exacerbate these problems. Instead, I urge you to make sensible reductions in our nuclear arsenal and to initiate reforms of our dangerous nuclear posture. These steps would not only help prevent global nuclear catastrophe by eliminating weapons and policies that make Americans less safe, but they would also free up funds for competing domestic and defense priorities.

Independent estimates suggest that the United States will spend nearly one trillion dollars over the next thirty years to modernize and maintain our nuclear forces. That sum is equal to the amount of money you have proposed to spend to address the gap in investment in “roads, bridges, tunnels, airports, railroads” and other infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

The trillion-dollar nuclear spending spree includes plans to create new nuclear weapons, especially a dangerous new nuclear air-launched cruise missile. As former Secretary of Defense William Perry has argued, this cruise missile is not only redundant, in light of our other nuclear and non-nuclear weapons systems, but it is also destabilizing, and could increase the risk of

<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/811977223326625792>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/policies/an-americas-infrastructure-first-plan>

nuclear war.<sup>3</sup> I urge you to cancel this system, which would save at least \$20 billion while making Americans safer.

You should also reconsider whether the United States needs to spend vast sums of money on retaining all three legs of the nuclear triad—our nuclear forces on air, land, and sea. In particular, I urge you to re-examine the need for ground-based missiles. Because ground-based missiles are highly vulnerable to destruction in a nuclear first strike, as president you would have only minutes to decide whether to “use them or lose them” in a crisis, increasing the risk that false alarms could lead to inadvertent nuclear escalation.

That risk, together with the estimated \$238 billion price tag for replacing these missiles and operating them over their life-time,<sup>4</sup> is why many prominent nuclear strategists have called for their gradual retirement. That includes retired General James E. Cartwright, a former commander of our nuclear forces,<sup>5</sup> Secretary Perry,<sup>6</sup> and General James Mattis, your nominee for Secretary of Defense. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in January 2015, Mattis asked, “Is it time to reduce the triad to a diad, removing the land-based missiles? This would reduce the false alarm danger.”<sup>7</sup>

You could further reduce the danger of false alarms by reforming our outdated nuclear posture. More than a quarter-century after the end of the Cold War, the military continues to plan for the use of nuclear weapons in response to the mere warning of a nuclear attack. Scrapping these “launch-on-warning” plans would provide you with time to deliberate in a crisis and reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war.

The U.S. also continues to maintain the option of using nuclear weapons first in a conflict, putting pressure on other nuclear powers to keep their own forces on hair-trigger alert and exacerbating the reciprocal fear of surprise attack. In light of our unmatched conventional military capabilities, the United States does not need to rely on the threat of nuclear first-use to deter non-nuclear attacks on our homeland or our allies. Adopting a policy of no-first-use would reduce the risk of accidental nuclear conflict while deterring both conventional and nuclear threats to our security.

Finally, I urge you to recommit to meaningful nuclear arms control with Russia as part of a broader effort to reduce military tensions with Moscow. Escalating the nuclear arms race by

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<sup>3</sup> William J. Perry and Andy Weber, “Mr. President, kill the new cruise missile,” *Washington Post*, October 15, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/mr-president-kill-the-new-cruise-missile/2015/10/15/e3e2807c-6ecd-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/mr-president-kill-the-new-cruise-missile/2015/10/15/e3e2807c-6ecd-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92_story.html)

<sup>4</sup> Kingston Reif, “Price Tag Rising for Planned ICBMs,” *Arms Control Today*, October 2016, [https://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/2016\\_10/News/Price-Tag-Rising-for-Planned-ICBMs](https://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/2016_10/News/Price-Tag-Rising-for-Planned-ICBMs)

<sup>5</sup> James E. Cartwright and Bruce G. Blair, “End the First-Use Policy for Nuclear Weapons,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/15/opinion/end-the-first-use-policy-for-nuclear-weapons.html>

<sup>6</sup> William J. Perry, “Why It’s Safe to Scrap America’s ICBMs,” *New York Times*, September 30, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/opinion/why-its-safe-to-scrap-americas-icbms.html>

<sup>7</sup> Statement of James N. Mattis before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 27, 2015, [http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Mattis\\_01-27-15.pdf](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Mattis_01-27-15.pdf)

building more nuclear weapons would undermine that objective, and it could violate the New START Treaty, which the United States and Russia signed in 2010. Building additional missile defenses would also increase U.S.-Russia tensions, and it could trigger a dangerous new nuclear arms race by encouraging Russia to build offensive nuclear arms. Instead of wasting billions of dollars on new nuclear weapons, I urge you to negotiate with Russia on a five-year extension of New START, and to initiate talks on a broader accord to achieve further bilateral cuts in defensive and offensive nuclear arms.

The existential risk of nuclear war has motivated previous presidents from both parties to engage in arms control negotiations as part of their national security strategy. Following your inauguration, you will have a similar opportunity, and Americans concerned about the risk of nuclear devastation expect you to seize it. By responsibly reducing our nuclear arsenal and reforming our nuclear posture, you would strengthen U.S. national security and reinforce the foundations of global peace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator