

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As your Administration begins work on the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), we write in support of taking steps to reduce the risk of nuclear war and encouraging diplomacy to halt and reverse dangerous nuclear competition. We respectfully urge you to actively guide the NPR process and expand your Interim National Security Strategic Guidance to reduce the role of “nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.”¹ Specifically, we recommend the following:

1. **Adjust our declaratory policy to assign a reduced role for U.S. nuclear weapons, consistent with your past stated views:** We welcome your June 16, 2021 Joint Statement in Geneva with Russian President Vladimir Putin reaffirming the principle that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”² We also agree with your January 2017 statement: “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.”³ We likewise conceive of no situation where the U.S. introduction of nuclear weapons to an armed conflict in response to a non-nuclear weapons attack would be consistent with the principles of necessity, discrimination, and proportionality. We hope that the NPR operationalizes your previously stated view that the United States will not need to fire the first shot in a nuclear conflict and that it configures its nuclear forces away from that warfighting posture accordingly.
2. **Expand evaluation criteria in targeting guidance:** As part of the NPR, we encourage you to direct the Department of Defense to include in its proposed target list a breakdown of the damage expectancy, civilian casualties, and climatic and humanitarian consequences stemming from nuclear weapons use. Even a limited nuclear exchange confined to one hemisphere would be felt by all the planet’s inhabitants through a sizable temperature drop, global famine, and other catastrophic events.⁴ To mitigate the risk of this scenario, we urge you to instruct the NPR drafters to model the climatic,

¹ *Interim National Security Guidance*, The White House (Mar. 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

² *U.S. Russia Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability*, United States Mission to Geneva (June 17, 2021), <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2021/06/17/u-s-russia-presidential-joint-statement-on-strategic-stability/>.

³ Joseph R. Biden, *Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security* (Jan. 11, 2017), [Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security | whitehouse.gov \(archives.gov\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-vice-president/2017/01/11/remarks-by-the-vice-president-on-nuclear-security/).

⁴ Alexandra Witze, *How a Small Nuclear War Would Transform the Entire Planet*, *Nature Magazine* (Mar. 16, 2020), <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00794-y>.

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environmental, and humanitarian effects of the U.S. target list and include viable options to assign non-nuclear weapons to those same targets.

3. **Examine the number and types of new weapons needed to deter nuclear attack:** The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recently estimated that the United States will spend \$634 billion over the next decade on nuclear weapons programs.⁵ This estimate, along with the President’s Fiscal Year 2022 budget request which leaves President Trump’s program of work largely unchanged, ignores recommendations from the Government Accountability Office to consider deferring or cancelling certain modernization programs that have overloaded the capacity of the Nuclear Weapons Enterprise.⁶ According to President Obama’s 2013 Nuclear Employment Guidance, the United States could safely reduce its deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third below New START levels, regardless of what Russia does.⁷ A reduction in the current U.S. nuclear force structure of that size — informed by your direct guidance in the NPR process — could reduce the mounting bill to U.S. taxpayers and restore U.S. global leadership on arms control, while meeting our national security and allied security commitments.

4. **Complete Review of the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent:** We reiterate our call for the Administration to have an independent, outside organization complete a thorough review of the technical feasibility of extending the life of the current Minuteman III ICBM missile. Before proceeding with a multiple-generation commitment to the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) — estimated to cost taxpayers \$264 billion through its life cycle — we should instead confirm that the Minuteman III ICBM indeed has “one more” life extension left before it must be replaced, consistent with Lieutenant General Richard Clark’s 2019 testimony before Congress.⁸ We therefore request that you promptly direct the Department of Defense to conduct an independent review that will conclude in time to inform your FY2023 budget request. We are confident that this review will conclude that steps such as a modest reduction in the deployed number of ICBMs and/or reducing the number of annual flight tests can safely extend the lifespan of Minuteman III until at least 2050, not to mention realize savings of tens of billions of taxpayer dollars through the late 2030s, according to the CBO.⁹

⁵ *Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2021 to 2030*, Congressional Budget Office (Jan. 24, 2019), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/57130>.

⁶ *National Nuclear Security Administration: Action Needed to Address Affordability of Nuclear Modernization Programs*, GAO-17-341 (Apr. 26, 2017), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-341>.

⁷ *FACT SHEET: Nuclear Weapons Employment Strategy of the United States*, The White House (Jun. 19, 2013), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/fact-sheet-nuclear-weapons-employment-strategy-united-states>.

⁸ George Perkovich and Pranay Vaddi, *Proportionate Deterrence: A Model Nuclear Posture Review*, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Jan. 21, 2021), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/01/21/appendix-further-exploration-of-minuteman-iii-life-extension-pub-83643>.

⁹ Kingston Reif, *Why the New ICBM Contract is a Bad Idea*, Defense News (Sep. 21, 2020), <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/09/21/why-the-new-icbm-contract-is-a-bad-deal/>.

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5. **Eliminate President Trump’s new types of nuclear weapons:** The U.S. Navy under the Trump administration completed the deployment of a new low-yield W76-2 warhead on U.S. ballistic missile submarines and began development of a new nuclear-armed sea launched cruise missile (SLCM), which your FY 2022 budget request retained. In 2019, as a candidate for president, you said that “[t]he United States does not need new nuclear weapons.”¹⁰ We agree, and we urge you to reverse the decisions from President Trump’s 2018 NPR to field two new types of lower yield nuclear weapons, both of which are more likely to exacerbate competition with Russia and China and invite miscalculation in a crisis than meet our deterrence and alliance commitments.

6. **Commit to pursuing robust diplomacy with Russia and China on arms control:** We applaud your decision to extend the New START Treaty with Russia an additional five years. The NPR should make negotiations on a successor treaty or agreement with Russia a foremost priority; a predictable strategic relationship with Russia remains the largest driver of our force structure and declaratory policy. We also encourage you to engage China meaningfully in bilateral strategic stability talks that build towards the eventual conclusion of arms control measures that reduce the risk of miscalculation. We also welcome suggestions on additional hiring authorities from Congress for the State Department’s bureaus leading negotiations with Russia, China, and others — if any — that will help advance arms control and the Department’s effort to create a diverse talent pool that reflects the best America has to offer.

Mr. President, as a United States Senator and then as Vice President, you were a party to every major nuclear weapons debate of the past five-decades. From bolstering the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, to building European support for the Intermediate-Nuclear Forces Treaty, to securing votes for ratification of the New START Treaty, you have consistently been on the right side of history. Your Administration’s NPR is a watershed moment where you can reject a 21st century arms race and make bold decisions to lead us towards a future where nuclear weapons no longer threaten all humanity.


We respectfully ask that you directly guide the NPR process to reduce the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, forego development of new nuclear weapons, and develop a saner declaratory policy on nuclear weapons use.

We stand ready to work with you to accomplish that critical mission.


Sincerely,

¹⁰ *Joe Biden on Nuclear Weapons Issues*, Council for a Livable World (June 2019 and Oct. 2020), <https://livableworld.org/meet-the-candidates/joe-biden-a-lifelong-champion-of-nuclear-arms-control/joe-biden-on-nuclear-weapons-issues/> .

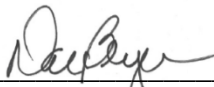
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United States Senator
Co-Chair, NWAC Working Group



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senator
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United States Senator



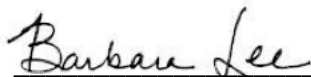
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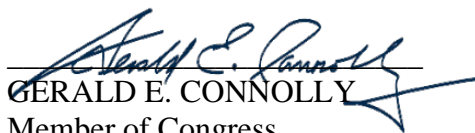
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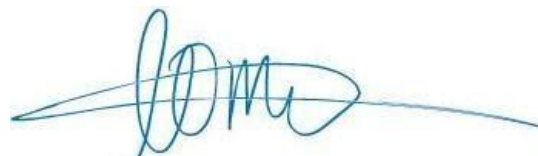
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BOBBY L. RUSH
Member of Congress



GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress



ILHAN OMAR
Member of Congress

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ami Bera". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end of the name.

AMI BERA
Member of Congress