

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 26, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
Washington DC 20050

We write in anticipation of the release of your Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).¹ Through Fiscal Year 2030, the United States is on a path to spend a striking \$630 billion on its nuclear weapons complex. While we commend steps you have already taken to address pressing nuclear dangers — from salvaging the last remaining U.S.-Russia strategic nuclear arms reduction treaty to joining the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states in emphasizing that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”² — the NPR is a defining moment. It is your best chance to take bold steps that reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons, elevate arms control, and retire President Trump’s new, unnecessary warfighting nuclear weapons.

Your decision to extend the New START Treaty with Russia will ensure that verifiable limits on the strategic forces of the two largest nuclear powers remain in place until 2026. The bilateral strategic stability dialogue underway with Russia to determine the strategic and non-strategic capabilities covered by a potential successor treaty or agreement is also an important step that we strongly support. Your NPR should bolster both these efforts by offering the United States’ full support for formal negotiations with Russia, with the express goal of placing mutual limits on the deployment of destabilizing new weapons that only increase the risk of an inadvertent nuclear war.

We also welcome your commitment with Chinese leader, Xi Jinping to “look to begin to carry forward discussion on strategic stability.”³ We hope that your NPR gives priority to negotiating confidence and transparency building measures with China. There remains a diplomatic window to convince Xi that China would have learned all the wrong lessons of the Cold War if it were to massively expand its strategic forces, a move that ultimately would be self-defeating.

Russian and Chinese nuclear modernization efforts, and the increased roles their nuclear forces play in their military and diplomatic strategies, are concerning and underscore the need for sustained high-level diplomacy. However, press reports leave us concerned that your

¹ Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2021 to 2030, Congressional Budget Office (May. 24, 2021), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/57130>.

² P5 Statement on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, The White House (Jan. 3, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/03/p5-statement-on-preventing-nuclear-war-and-avoiding-arms-races/>.

³ *Biden and Xi agree to look at possible arms control talks, says Biden advisor*, Reuters (Nov. 17, 2021), <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/17/biden-and-xi-agree-to-look-at-possible-arms-control-talks-says-biden-advisor.html>.

Administration may opt to make few substantive changes to your predecessor's 2018 NPR.⁴ A status quo posture that does not measurably reduce the “role of nuclear weapons in national security strategy” — as your Interim National Defense Strategy calls for⁵ — threatens to throw into overdrive the Cold War arms race action-reaction cycle, with Russia and China likely to race to deploy new offensive and defensive capabilities to counter any perceived U.S. nuclear advantage. A clean break with President Trump's policies can send a strong signal to Russia and China that the United States believes restraint and nuclear arms reduction are measures of a country's great power status, not nuclear weapons overkill.

Building off the January 3 statement from the five nuclear-weapon states, we also urge you to declare that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack on the United States and its allies, and that the United States will never use nuclear weapons first. Changes in the international security environment have not altered your 2017 assessment as Vice President that “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.”⁶ Conventional forces bolster U.S. extended deterrence guarantees to our allies, and those forces can inflict unacceptable costs on our adversaries, making them more credible tools than the first use of nuclear weapons.

Ceasing both the deployment of President Trump's low-yield W-76(2) warhead on a submarine launched ballistic missiles and the further development of a nuclear-armed sea launched cruise missile would further signal that the United States believes that deterrence, not warfighting, is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons. We agree with your 2019 statement on President Trump's development of new nuclear weapon capabilities — that “the United States does not need new nuclear weapons. Our current arsenal of weapons, sustained by the Stockpile Stewardship program, is sufficient to meet our deterrence and alliance requirements.”⁷

Your forthcoming NPR should reflect your Administration's views, not embrace President Trump's nuclear weapons programs. The Trump administration never fully justified their mission. And their development will defy the repeated recommendations of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to consider deferring the start of or cancelling those programs.⁸ It is concerning that the Department of Defense continues to resist calls by Members of Congress for a comprehensive, independent study of whether to pursue the new ground-based strategic deterrent, based on an examination of the cost savings and the technical feasibility of extending the Minuteman III ICBM.⁹ We urge you to question the necessity of new nuclear weapons

⁴ Robert Burns, *Angst over China, Russia lessens chance of US nuke changes*, Associated Press (Jan. 3, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-europe-russia-china-ukraine-a7cc93ab7f9b546acb47034aab490841>.

⁵ Interim National Security Guidance, The White House (Mar. 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

⁶ Joseph R. Biden, Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security (Jan. 11, 2017), <https://obamawhitehouse.I.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/12/remarks-vice-president-nuclear-security>

⁷ Presidential Candidates: Joe Biden, Council for a Livable World, <https://livableworld.org/presidential-candidates-joe-biden/>.

⁸ 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>.

⁹ Letter from Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley and Senator Elizabeth Warren to National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan (August, 2021).

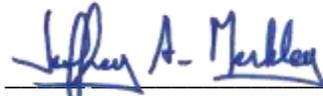
systems and the sustainability of the current expansive program of work. Doing so will also create space for your Administration's bilateral strategic stability dialogue with Russia to progress, and allow time to gauge the willingness of China to engage in nuclear risk reduction negotiations.

Your NPR represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure that U.S. nuclear doctrine reflects your recognition that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. As president, you can exercise badly needed leadership in reducing the role, number, and salience of nuclear weapons at home and abroad so that future generations can finally be free from the nuclear sword of Damocles that hangs over all our heads. We urge you to do so.

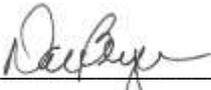
Sincerely,



EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator
Co-Chair, NWAC Working Group



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senator
Co-Chair, NWAC Working Group



DONALD S. BEYER JR.
Member of Congress
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JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress
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United States Senator



TINA SMITH
United States Senator



TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator



CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator



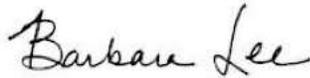
RON WYDEN
United States Senator

/s

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



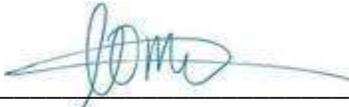
SHERROD BROWN
United States Senator



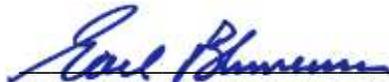
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Member of Congress



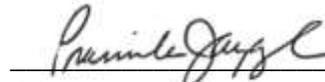
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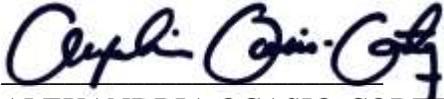
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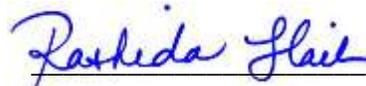
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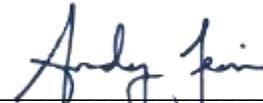
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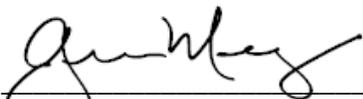
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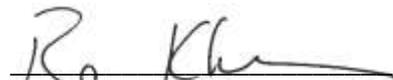
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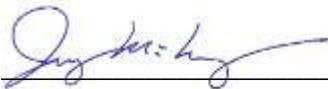
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GWEN MOORE
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MARK TAKANO
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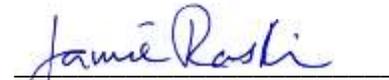
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