

June 3, 2019

Sen. Jim Inhofe  
Sen. Jack Reed

Rep. Adam Smith  
Rep. Mac Thornberry

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members,

As national security professionals, we recognize that there are no realms with higher stakes than nuclear weapons policy. We all share the same deep concern that recent technological and geopolitical developments are undermining international nonproliferation efforts core to our national security interests. It is essential that Congress exercise its authorities to reduce the risk of a fatal miscalculation.

To that end, we write to urge you to support effective, smart, and responsible nuclear policy in this year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

First, Congress should support executive extension of the New START treaty. The treaty is set to expire in 2021, and this administration has done nothing to suggest it will take the initiative to extend New START on its own. Reports that the White House wants to negotiate a new multilateral arms control agreement with Moscow and Beijing, which remains nothing more than an aspiration, should not stand in the way of extending New START, the only remaining strategic nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia. Congress should take a stand in this year's NDAA, expressing its strong preference for an executive extension of New START for five years.

Additionally, Congress should defund and prohibit deployment of low-yield nuclear weapons in this year's NDAA to reduce the risk of nuclear escalation. Our principal concern with low-yield nuclear weapons is not their cost; rather, it's their destabilizing effect on global security. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review claimed low-yield nukes would be used to maintain "flexibility" in the face of Russian regional aggression. In reality, deploying low-yield nukes not only lowers the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, but it signals to adversaries that the United States would respond reciprocally (rather than overwhelmingly) to a nuclear attack. It incentivizes thinking in Moscow and Beijing that developing and deploying low-yield nuclear weapons is necessary to keep pace with the United States and could be a viable option in theater. To be clear, any use of a nuclear weapon on the battlefield would be thousands of times more devastating than conventional arms and could result in irreversible environmental contamination. The NDAA must include provisions preventing the use of appropriated funds for deployment of low-yield nuclear weapons to make clear that the United States does not believe that nuclear war can be limited at low levels.

Finally, Congress should keep our adversaries' recent advancements in missile technology in perspective. The development of hypersonic missiles by China and Russia is a serious military challenge, but it does not fundamentally change the logic of

nuclear deterrence and therefore should not be cause for dangerous overreaction. Credible deterrence does not require new categories of weapons but rather maintaining an ironclad second-strike capability, currently provided by our Ohio-class submarines. Instead of pouring billions into growing our nuclear stockpile or designing new warheads, Congress should focus on modernizing our outdated Command, Control, and Communications systems to secure them from cyberattacks or other technical failures.

As leaders of the Armed Service Committees, you have an opportunity with this year's NDAA to both push back on the administration's dangerous impulses and set the nonproliferation agenda going forward. The provisions outlined above represent the consensus in our policy community of necessary steps towards a strong and secure nuclear policy. If adopted, these recommendations will help keep Americans safe and prevent the doomsday clock from ticking closer to midnight.

Sincerely,

**Alex Bell**, Former Director for Strategic Outreach in the Office of the Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, U.S. Department of State

**Antony Blinken**, Former Deputy Secretary of State

**Rebecca Brocato**, Former Special Assistant to President Obama

**Governor Jerry Brown**, Former Governor of California

**Joe Cirincione**, President of the Ploughshares Fund

**Thomas Countryman**, Chairman of the Board of the Arms Control Association and Former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation

**Jon Finer**, Former Chief of Staff and Director of Policy Planning, U.S. Department of State

**Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robert G. Gard, Jr.**, Former Board Chair, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation

**Senator Gary Hart**, Former U.S. Senator

**Newell Highsmith**, Former Deputy Legal Adviser, U.S. Department of State

**Frank von Hippel**, Former Assistant Director for National Security, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

**Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins**, Former Coordinator for Threat Reduction Programs, U.S. Department of State

**Colin Kahl**, Former National Security Adviser to Vice President Biden

**Ambassador (Ret.) Laura Kennedy**, Former U.S. Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament

**Kelly Magsamen**, Former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

**Richard Nephew**, Former Principal Deputy for Sanctions Policy, U.S. Department of State

**Secretary William Perry**, Former U.S. Secretary of Defense

**Jeff Prescott**, Former Senior Director, National Security Council

**Ned Price**, Former Senior Director, National Security Council

**Ben Rhodes**, Former Deputy National Security Adviser to President Obama

**Ambassador Wendy Sherman**, Former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

**Jake Sullivan**, Former National Security Adviser to Vice President Biden

**Congressman John Tierney**, Executive Director of the Council for a Livable World and  
Former U.S. House Member

**Moira Whelan**, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Digital Strategy, U.S.  
Department of State

**Jon Wolfsthal**, Former Senior Director for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, National  
Security Council

**Senator Mark Udall**, Former U.S. Senator