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## **Restricting the First Use of Nuclear Weapons**

### ***The U.S. First Use Policy is a Security Liability***

The current U.S. policy that threatens the first use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear threats has always been controversial. Today, the policy has become an increasingly dangerous relic of the Cold War. Even military leaders who have been in charge of our nuclear forces, such as General James E. Cartwright, [argue that there is no need for this policy](#)<sup>1</sup> that cannot be addressed by economic, diplomatic and conventional tools. At the same time, such a policy threatens the U.S., our allies, and the world. Should the United States ever launch a nuclear first strike, the risks of catastrophic escalation would be great. Should one nuclear attack lead to others, a nuclear winter could ensue, [risking billions of casualties and a global environmental crisis](#).<sup>2</sup>

### ***Maintaining the First Use Policy Increases the Chance of Unintended Nuclear War***

Maintaining the right to use nuclear weapons first, particularly when the decision of whether or not to do so is left in the hands of one person, encourages other nations to pursue nuclear weapons with advanced capabilities in order to deter a potential first strike by the United States. As [ten Senators wrote to President Obama last year](#),<sup>3</sup> a First Use policy: “exacerbates mutual fears of surprise attack, putting pressure on other nuclear-armed states to keep their arsenals on high-alert and increasing the risk of unintended nuclear war.”

### ***No President Should be Able to Unilaterally Launch a Nuclear First Strike, Especially Trump***

Short of the United States declaring a No First Use policy, Congress intervening to reassure the world that the U.S. will not launch a nuclear first strike on the whim of one individual would necessarily and dramatically reduce the risks of nuclear proliferation and nuclear war. This intervention is even more urgent given the current President’s professed unpredictability and his dearth of understanding of nuclear weapons policy and the risks associated with using nuclear weapons. In no small part because of the President’s statements about nuclear weapons, the

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<sup>1</sup> Cartwright, James, and Bruce Blair, *End the First-Use Policy for Nuclear Weapons*, New York Times, August 14, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Germanos, Andrea, *Nuclear War Could Mean ‘Extinction of the Human Race’*, Common Dreams, December 10, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Markey, Edward, et al., *Letter to President Obama on Nuclear Weapons*, United States Senate, July 20, 2016

[Bulletin of Atomic Scientists](#)<sup>4</sup> recently moved the infamous doomsday clock from 3 minutes to 2 and a half minutes to midnight, midnight representing nuclear catastrophe.

### ***Requiring a Declaration of War from Congress for a Nuclear First Strike Would Promote Stability and Nonproliferation***

The nuclear states are currently reverting to a cycle of escalation unrivaled since the Cold War. With the U.S. and Russia both [working to upgrade their nuclear arsenals](#)<sup>5</sup> and create new capabilities designed to make nuclear weapons more usable, the risk of nuclear war is higher than it's been in decades. Requiring a declaration of war from Congress before the President could order a nuclear first strike would represent an important step back from this cycle of escalation.

### ***Ways for Activists to Stay Active on This Issue***

- **Contact your Senators and your Representative** and let them know your thoughts on this issue
  - Call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 to get connected with their offices.
  - Lookup your members of Congress online to find out how to contact them by email.
- **Write and submit letters to the editor** in response to articles on this topic
  - Letters to the editor can be a powerful way to educate the public and influence public opinion.
  - Find an article that you want to correct, critique, add to, or reinforce and try to keep your letter short and to the point.
  - Check the papers guidelines for submitting letters to the editor, and follow them.
  - Local papers will be easier to get placed in, but if you're feeling ambitious, you can always write a letter to major papers like the New York Times.
- **Attend meetings, rallies, protests**, and any gathering designed to raise public awareness and scrutiny of the issue

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<sup>4</sup> Krauss, Lawrence, and David Titley, *Thanks to Trump, the Doomsday Clock Advances Towards Midnight*, New York Times, January 26, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Board, William, and David Sanger, *Race for Latest Class of Nuclear Arms Threatens to Revive Cold War*, New York Times, April 16, 2016