

Fact Sheet on No First Use of Nuclear Weapons

- No first use (NFU) refers to a pledge or a policy by a nuclear power not to use nuclear weapons in a conflict unless attacked first with nuclear weapons by an adversary.
- The United States has a vested interest in avoiding a nuclear exchange or conflict—an increased likelihood of a nuclear exchange would weaken national security, and lowering the threshold for a nuclear first strike puts all Americans’ lives at risk.
- According to William J. Perry, former Secretary of Defense, “the risk of nuclear catastrophe is greater today than during the Cold War.”ⁱ
- The United States does not currently have a pledge or policy of no first use of nuclear weapons.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) expands the range of significant non-nuclear strategic attacks to which the U.S. may respond with use of nuclear weapons ⁱⁱⁱ to include cyberattacks and chemical and biological warfare.
- No nation’s existing emergency response system, including the United States’, would be able to handle the mass health effects and casualties from a nuclear exchange.
- The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review states, “Effective U.S. deterrence of nuclear attack and non-nuclear strategic attack requires ensuring that potential adversaries do not miscalculate regarding the consequences of nuclear first use, either regionally or against the United States itself. They must understand that there are no possible benefits from non-nuclear aggression or limited nuclear escalation.” ^{iv} The United States likewise cannot afford to miscalculate the consequences of first use, and our strategic stability likewise depends on no first use.
- In Fiscal Year (FY) 18, \$14.1 billion was allocated to the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)^v, including funding to prepare for a first strike. This money could be spent instead on infrastructure repair, job creation, education, healthcare, housing and other vital programs and services that improve Americans’ health and security.
- In January 2019, the Congressional Budget Office revised upward its estimate of the future cost of nuclear weapons^{vi}: the CBO projects \$494 billion (in current dollars) in spending to sustain and modernize U.S. nuclear forces between FY 2019 and FY 2028. This means an increase of \$94 billion (or about 23%) above the \$400 billion projected in the last ten-year report covering FY 2017 to FY 2026.

Resources

Adam Smith/ Elizabeth Warren Statement: <https://adamsmith.house.gov/2019/1/chairman-smith-senator-warren-introduce-bill-establishing-no-first-use-policy-for-nuclear-weapons>

No First Use Act Text:

<https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/No%20First%20Use%20Act.pdf>

PSR Official Statement:

<https://www.psr.org/blog/2019/01/30/just-what-the-doctor-ordered-for-our-health-and- future-no-first-use-legislation/>

Vice President Biden's remarks

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/12/remarks-vice-president-nuclear-security>

2018 Nuclear Posture Review:

<https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>

Nuclear Famine report:

<https://www.psr.org/blog/resource/nuclear-famine-two-billion-people-at-risk/>

ⁱ "Nuclear Nightmares. The William J. Perry Project. 2015. <http://www.wjperryproject.org/nuclear-nightmares>

ⁱⁱ "No First Use and Credible Deterrence." Steve Fetter & Jon Wolfsthal. Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament. 9 April 2018.1:1, 102---114, DOI: 10.1080/25751654.2018.1454257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2018.1454257>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nuclear Posture Review. Office of the Secretary of Defense. February 2018. <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/1/1/1/2018%E2%80%90NUCLEAR-%C2%ACPOSTURE-%C2%ACREVIEW-%C2%ACFINAL-REPORT.PDF>

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Approaches for Managing the Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2017 to 2046." Congressional Budget Office. 31 October 2017. <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/53211>

^{vi} "Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2019 to 2028." Congressional Budget Office. 24 January 2019. <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/54914>