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PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

U.S. AFFILIATE OF INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR

“No First Use” Talking Points

- On January 30, Representative Adam Smith (D-WA), Chair of the House Armed Services Committee and Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced the “No First Use Act” in the House (H.R. 921) and Senate (S. 272).
- No first use (NFU) refers to a pledge or a policy by a nuclear-armed country not to use nuclear weapons as a means of war except in response to a nuclear attack. This policy has been previously applied by the United States in the case of chemical and biological warfare.
- Currently, the President of the United States has the sole authority to order the launch of some 800 nuclear warheads within about 15 minutes, from the total U.S. arsenal of 1,800 deployed nuclear weapons
- An international crisis involving nuclear-armed adversaries could rapidly escalate because of the fear of a pre-emptive strike. By “raising the nuclear threshold,” a No First Use policy lowers the risk of inadvertent nuclear war.
- There is no way to ensure that escalation could be stopped after first-use of nuclear weapons.
- If a nuclear exchange escalated to general nuclear war, millions of Americans would perish in the first 24 hours, and billions of people could die from the climate impacts on agriculture from “nuclear winter.”
- There is no adequate health or emergency response in the event of a nuclear attack. No nation, including the United States, is adequately prepared for the event of a nuclear exchange.
- A 2017 Congressional Budget Office report estimated that the United States plans to spend \$400 billion over the next 30 years to replace its current nuclear force with new weapons. Much of that spending is intended to augment the first-strike capabilities of the weapons. That’s money that could instead fund vital programs and services relating to infrastructure, education, jobs, housing, and more.
- The United States issuing a policy of No First Use would put international pressure on other nuclear actors to do the same, such as Pakistan and Russia.
- A No First Use policy can be seen as a necessary step to global disarmament, and a recognition that nuclear weapons fall outside the realm of legitimate weapons.

"Introducing nuclear weapons first is an unacceptable escalation of any conflict that we could possibly envision... I don't think it makes sense to have the use of nuclear weapons on the table as an option." — Rep. Adam Smith, December 2018

"Our current nuclear strategy is not just outdated—it is dangerous. By making clear that deterrence is the sole purpose of our arsenal, this bill would reduce the chances of a nuclear miscalculation and help us maintain our moral and diplomatic leadership in the world."— Statement from Rep. Adam Smith and Sen. Elizabeth Warren on the announcement of their No First Use legislation

"I never confronted a situation, or could even imagine a situation, in which I would recommend that the President make a first strike with nuclear weapons—understanding that such an action, whatever the provocation, would likely bring about the end of civilization." — Former Defense Secretary Bill Perry, who served under President Clinton

"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. President Obama and I are confident we can deter—and defend ourselves and our Allies against—non-nuclear threats through other means."— Former Vice President Joseph Biden

Resources

Smith/ 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/>

2018 Nuclear Posture Review:

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

Vice President Biden's remarks

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

CBO Report:

<https://www.cbo.gov/publication/53211>

Nuclear Famine report:

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