

April 9, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Six years ago this week in Prague you gave hope to the world when you spoke “clearly and with conviction” of “America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”¹ Later that year, your promotion of nuclear non-proliferation was cited when you were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Also this week, we celebrate the signing of the New START Treaty, which was ratified and entered into force in 2011.

You have made other laudable, concrete steps toward your ultimate goal—including the complete removal of nuclear material in 16 countries plus Taiwan.² We also are encouraged by and extremely supportive of your current diplomatic efforts to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. The progress made toward a peaceful, comprehensive, and verifiable agreement is a tremendous achievement—and we will continue to do all we can to support these efforts.

There are, however, other critical steps for nuclear security that can be taken before you end your second term as President.

We are troubled by a seeming reversal of your promise to “end Cold War thinking” and “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.” Your FY16 Budget Proposal increases spending on nuclear weapons and prioritizes an unnecessary and unsustainable spending plan to modernize our nuclear triad—air, land, and sea nuclear weapons designed for last century’s threats. We know that the current plan to spend more than \$1 trillion over the next

¹ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered

² <http://nnsa.energy.gov/mediaroom/factsheets/reducingthreats>

three decades is unaffordable because the Air Force and the Navy have already sought to use off-budget accounts to fund overhauling two legs of the triad.³

As Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), former Chair and now Ranking Member of the Senate subcommittee charged with overseeing the nuclear weapons complex, told *Washington Post* readers last December, “We’re holding far more nuclear weapons than are necessary, and the cost is undermining other national security priorities. It’s time we take a long look at how we can responsibly reduce our stockpile.”⁴

Mr. President, it is not too late to take bold steps toward fulfilling the promises you made in Prague.

You have taken dramatic steps on immigration reform, climate change, and diplomatic relations with Cuba. The proliferation of nuclear weapons is the single greatest threat to our existence as a people, a nation, and a planet. **We urge you to lead the world by example and act now to preserve, protect and strengthen the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation framework.**

This framework has successfully reduced the number of nuclear warheads from more than 70,000 worldwide at the height of the Cold War, to approximately 16,300 today. Of course, that is still an unacceptably large number of these weapons of mass destruction. Both the United States and Russia maintain nuclear weapons stockpiles that greatly exceed any conceivable security need. Today, the most pressing threat is the possibility that nuclear materials could fall into the hands of terrorists. Drastically reducing the number of nuclear weapons and the amount of nuclear materials that must be secured is the most practical way to address the very real threat of nuclear terrorism.

For more than two decades, the United States and Russia have partnered to secure and eliminate dangerous nuclear materials “not as a favor to one another but as a common-sense commitment, born of mutual self-interest, to prevent catastrophic nuclear terrorism,” according to former

³ http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Ensuring-a-Strong-U.S.-Defense-for-the-Future-NDP-Review-of-the-QDR_0.pdf, http://cns.miis.edu/opapers/pdfs/140107_trillion_dollar_nuclear_triad.pdf

⁴ http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dianne-feinstein-our-large-nuclear-arsenal-is-unnecessary-and-unsustainable/2014/12/03/1f835ed0-7320-11e4-9c9f-a37e29e80cd5_story.html

Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar in *The Washington Post*. “Failing to cooperate in this area is a ‘lose-lose’ proposition that would damage the vital interests of both nations and vastly increase the risk of nuclear terrorism. The United States and Russia must recognize the imperative to provide global leadership. The consequences of inaction are simply too great.”⁵

We, too, urge you to not abandon cooperation with Russia, as it is vital to our national and global security.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aggression in Ukraine, his saber-rattling, increasing forays of Russian military aircrafts, and plans for reinvestment in nuclear weapons do not undercut, but rather reinforce, the need for the U.S. to lead on nuclear security.

While you have said the United States will maintain a strong and capable nuclear deterrent as long as these weapons exist, every step we take to reduce their role will make our country and the world safer. Indeed, the thing that might ensure Putin’s relevance and allow Russia to become a super power once more would be for the United States to overreact and engage in a new arms race or second Cold War.

Instead, Mr. President, you should demonstrate our global, military and economic strength by reducing the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and by leading global nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

A series of steps to be taken on nuclear issues will be important to communicate to the world at the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit or next month at the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference at the UN Headquarters in New York.

There are at least five actions that you can initiate that would go a long way to increase the United States’ strength and leadership on global nuclear security, *and* to enhance our national and economic security here at home:

- 1) Increase transparency and accountability for nuclear weapons:** Make public the total size and the annual and lifetime cost of the U.S. nuclear stockpile—including the number of weapons (deployed and non-deployed), components, and

⁵ <http://wapo.st/15zDcOk>

fissile material (the U.S. inventory of Highly Enriched Uranium has not been made public since 2006). In addition, make public the number of weapons in the dismantlement queue, as well as the year, type, and number for each warhead type dismantled.

This information is needed in order for the American people and their representatives in Congress to make better decisions about the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and federal spending plans. Sharing information will also build trust with other nations and further non-proliferation efforts.

- 2) **Increase nuclear security through cooperation with Russia:** For more than 20 years, the United States and Russia have cooperated to secure and monitor dangerous nuclear materials, reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism and improving global security. Unfortunately, most nuclear security work between the U.S. and Russia has been halted. Discord with Russia must not end critical cooperation on arms control and nuclear security issues. You must be steadfast, as you have been in the current diplomacy with Iran, and as President Reagan was, in continuing to find opportunities for cooperation with Russia even when other significant disagreements abound. We urge you to reinvigorate your administration's efforts to reestablish nuclear security cooperation with Russia.

During your June 2013 speech in Berlin, you expressed interest in pursuing further reductions to the nuclear arsenal, up to a third below New START. This proposal would save valuable taxpayer dollars and increase our security. We urge you to continue to seek further reduction to the nuclear arsenal and to continue to reduce the global stockpile of nuclear weapons through arms control efforts with Russia.

- 3) **Work with Congress to preserve arms control agreements and nuclear security programs:** Nuclear terrorism is one of the greatest threats to the security of humankind. It is essential that you preserve and protect the successful non-proliferation framework and keep open paths to inspection and verification of disarmament in Russia and around the world. We urge you to first work with Congress to avoid, and then, if necessary, veto any legislation that might undermine New START, the centerpiece of your nuclear security legacy, or the implementation of any other arms control agreement. Now is not the time to go backwards. Please also veto any legislation that may undermine your efforts to continue to seek compliance from and cooperation with Russia. Please also ensure

that the nuclear security programs within Nuclear Defense Non-proliferation are adequately funded to address the threat posed by poorly secured nuclear material in other countries.

- 4) **Reduce the size of the nuclear hedge:** The U.S. stockpile contains an estimated 4,804 nuclear warheads, of which about 1,600 are deployed and 3,204 are backups in the so-called hedge in case a technical or geopolitical surprise arises. As Sen. Feinstein said, “Having reserve weapons may be smart policy, but maintaining two spares for each deployed weapon is excessive.” She additionally notes, “And doing so could save hundreds of millions of dollars a year.”⁶ We urge you to cut the size of the hedge at least in half, and move to dismantle these excess weapons. The easiest way to begin would be to retire now the weapons already slated for retirement.⁷
- 5) **Redefine the role of nuclear weapons for generations to come:** As the country with the strongest conventional capabilities in the world, it is in the United States’ interest to further refine the role nuclear weapons play in our national security strategy. A declaration that the exclusive, rather than fundamental, role of nuclear weapons in U.S. policy is to deter a nuclear attack would be a strong sign of national and global leadership. Retaining the option of using nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear actions by other states provides justification for other countries to seek or increase their own nuclear weapons.

Taken in part, or together, these steps can win widespread support from an American public whose safety and security is jeopardized by the large nuclear weapons force that costs billions of taxpayer dollars. Even after these actions, the United States will retain an overwhelming nuclear weapons force—but one that is more secure and more affordable.

As you are well aware, previous Democratic and Republican presidents have made significant changes to U.S. nuclear posture and force levels without formal treaties or bilateral agreements. You have the authority to act boldly to right-size the U.S. nuclear force for today’s threats.

Mr. President, we are impressed and inspired by your diplomacy with Iran and your past commitments to nuclear security. We stand ready to support you in actions to achieve your

⁶ http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dianne-feinstein-our-large-nuclear-arsenal-is-unnecessary-and-unsustainable/2014/12/03/1f835ed0-7320-11e4-9c9f-a37e29e80cd5_story.html

⁷ <http://fas.org/blogs/security/2014/10/stockpilereductions/>

vision and secure your legacy of making our nation and the world safer from the threat of nuclear weapons for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Angela Canterbury
Executive Director

John Isaacs
Senior Fellow

