

# Back from the Brink: The Call to Prevent Nuclear War

We call on the United States to lead a global effort to prevent nuclear war by:

- **renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first**
  - **ending the sole, unchecked authority of any President to launch a nuclear attack**
  - **taking US nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert**
  - **cancelling the plan to replace its entire arsenal with enhanced weapons;**
  - **actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals**
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## Background

Since the height of the Cold War the U.S. and Russia have dismantled more than 50,000 nuclear warheads, but 15,000 of these weapons still exist and they pose an intolerable risk to human survival. 95% of these weapons are in the hands of the United States and Russia; the rest are held by seven other countries, the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea.

[[“Status of World Nuclear Forces,”](#) by Hans Kristensen and Robert Norris, Federation of American Scientists, (ca late 2017)]

The use of even a tiny fraction of these weapons would cause worldwide climate disruption and global famine. As few as 100 Hiroshima sized bombs, small by modern standards, would put at least 5 million tons of soot into the upper atmosphere and cause climate disruption across the planet, cutting food production and putting 2 billion people at risk of starvation

[[“Nuclear Famine: Two Billion People At Risk?”](#) Global Impacts of Limited Nuclear War on Agriculture, Food Supplies, and Human Nutrition,” (PDF) by Ira Helfand, MD, IPPNW, PSR, 2nd edition, 2013]

A large scale nuclear war would kill hundreds of millions of people directly and cause unimaginable environmental damage. It would also cause catastrophic climate disruption dropping temperatures across the planet to levels not seen since the last ice age. Under these conditions the vast majority of the human race would starve and it is possible we would become extinct as a species.

[[“Projected US Casualties and Destruction of US Medical Services From Attacks by Russian Nuclear Forces,”](#) Helfand, Forrow, McCally, Musil, *Medicine and Global Survival*, Feb 2002

[[“Nuclear winter revisited with a modern climate model and current nuclear arsenals: Still catastrophic consequences,”](#) Alan Robock, Luke Oman, and Georgiy L. Stenchikov, *Journal of Geophysical Research*, 6 Jul 2007]

Despite assurances that these arsenals exist solely to guarantee they are never used, there have been many occasions when nuclear armed countries have prepared to use these weapons, and war has been averted at the last minute.

[[“Close Calls with Nuclear Weapons,”](#) Union of Concerned Scientists FACT SHEET, Jan 2015]

Nuclear weapons do not possess some magical quality that prevents their being used. As former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara said, speaking about the Cuban Missile Crisis, [“At the end, we lucked out — it was \*luck\* that prevented nuclear war.”](#) Our current nuclear policy is essentially the hope that our good luck lasts.

Furthermore, the danger of nuclear war is growing as climate change puts increased stress on communities around the world increasing the likelihood of conflict

[[“Once Again, Climate Change Cited as Trigger for Conflict,”](#) Adam Alton, *Scientific American*, 9 Jun 2017]

The planned expenditure of \$1.2 trillion to enhance our nuclear arsenal will exacerbate these dangers by fueling a global arms race and it will divert crucial resources needed to assure the well-being of the American people.

[[U.S. Nuclear Modernization Programs](#) FACT SHEETS & BRIEFS, *Arms Control Association*, Jan 2018]

There is an alternative to this march to nuclear war. In July of 2017, 122 nations called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons by adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The United States should embrace this call for nuclear disarmament as the centerpiece of our national security policy.

[[UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) (full text)]