

PREVENT NUCLEAR WAR MARYLAND

SJ0002 –Use of Nuclear Weapons Hearing in Education, Energy and the Environment MARCH 8, 2024: 9 am Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

PREVENT NUCLEAR WAR MARYLAND urges the Maryland Senate to pass SJ0002, a resolution urging the federal government to endorse the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and to enact the five policy points of the Back from the Brink (BFTB) campaign: Negotiating nuclear disarmament with the other 8 nuclear nations; Renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first; Ending presidential sole authority to initiate a nuclear launch; Taking nuclear weapons off of hair trigger alert; and Ending the expensive, destabilizing plans to modernize our nuclear weapons arsenal. It urges our U.S. representatives to do this by cosponsoring H.Res.77 which supports both the TPNW and BFTB.

The story of nuclear weapons will have an ending. It will either be the end of nuclear weapons or the end of human civilization. We have been incredibly fortunate throughout the nuclear weapons era. As Robert McNamara famously [declared](#) after the Cuban Missile Crisis, “We lucked out. It was luck that prevented nuclear war.” The policies of the nuclear weapons states are essentially a hope that this luck will continue. But hoping for good luck is not an acceptable security policy and, sooner or later, our luck will run out.

This is the policy of nuclear deterrence - that our luck will last forever and that it will work perfectly without error into the infinite future. Unfortunately, every technology made by man fails eventually. Every human being fails sometime. And when the technology is nuclear weapons, failure could mean the end of human civilization. We already have a documented history of near civilization ending nuclear accidents, miscalculations, and technical errors. Our luck won't last forever.

A 2002 study published in the August issue of Nature Food showed that if a regional nuclear war took place in some cities involving 250 nuclear bombs, representing less than 3% of the total number of nuclear weapons in the world, 127 million people would be killed from the direct effects. Even worse, the resulting fires would loft 37 teragrams of soot into the stratosphere, lowering global temperatures enough to reduce global food production to the point where 2.1 billion people would die of starvation within the first two years. This is the death of nearly one out of every three human beings on the planet within two years. We would likely see massive population displacements and refugee crises, the collapse of food and healthcare systems, and existential conflicts for survival between nations fighting for scarce resources. In short, civilization as we know it would cease to exist.

Nuclear weapons also increasingly lack utility. All technologies have life cycles and are eventually replaced by newer technologies. This is Cold War technology that has progressively less utility over time. They do nothing to protect us from cyber warfare, pandemics, the climate crisis, weaponized AI, or autonomous weapon systems. Yet we are planning to spend \$1.7 trillion in taxpayer money over the next thirty years to hold onto these legacy weapon systems for another fifty years.

This happens because nuclear weapons policy isn't always based on rational security assessments but instead is often influenced by the interests of defense industry lobbyists and the calculations by members of Congress about how legislation will affect jobs in the home states or districts. One clear example of this is illustrated in this recent [article](#) from Responsible Statecraft and the Guardian highlighting that nine of the 12 members of the high-level congressional committee, the [Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States](#), charged with advising on the U.S.'s nuclear weapons strategy have direct financial ties to contractors that would benefit from the report's recommendations or are employed at think tanks that receive considerable funding from weapons manufacturers.

As a result, this commission is recommending that the U.S. go beyond the \$1.7 trillion in planned spending and order even more weapons. This is based on the misguided and unexamined assumption that more weapons equals more safety. The US strategy is to just build more nukes. It's a mathematical solution to a problem that doesn't have a defined mathematical need. How many weapons do you actually need to hold the enemy at risk? What amount of damage do you credibly need to threaten? How much damage are you willing to sustain before you know you need to adjust your strategy? There is no detail about the numbers necessary to justify specific missions, yet it still suggests a major increase in numbers.

We need to change the starting assumption from "nuclear weapons make as safe" to "nuclear weapons are our greatest risk." Nuclear deterrence is a Faustian bargain that if we hold each other in increasing levels of catastrophic risk then we will be safe. It's a Sword of Damocles hanging over our heads and we can't solve this problem with a quick strike. We need to carefully untie this Gordian knot with education.

We need members of Congress to talk about transitioning to a new security paradigm that is not dependent on weapons that can end civilization. Unfortunately, there is a lack of vision and courage in Congress to even imagine this being in the realm of possibility.

Congressman Jim McGovern describes the problem as a lack of urgency in Congress. He wants the urgency of this existential threat to be normalized in Congressional debate. As a first step, he introduced H.Res.77 in the hope that with enough cosponsors we can set the stage for congressional briefing to educate more members of Congress on the risks of nuclear weapons.

Some in Congress might say that they like the idea of a world without nuclear weapons, but that it is idealism and we need to deal in realism. To that I say the realist view is the nuclear weapons are going to eventually fail and ignoring that reality and simply continuing to build more nukes in the unexamined belief that more nukes equals more safety is the height of idealism. The longer we hold on to them the greater the risk grows as more nations will try to acquire them, increasing the risk of conflicts escalating into nuclear war.

Some might ask if this is the right time to talk about this given the multiple conflicts in the world. My response is that even in a state of high tensions, there is historical precedent for making breakthroughs. At the height of the Cold War, Reagan and Gorbachev had realizations about the horrific humanitarian consequences of nuclear war. They genuinely wanted a future for their children and grandchildren without the threat of nuclear annihilation. They trusted each other. They were willing to be rebuffed by critics including their own advisors. They were determined to achieve complete elimination of nuclear weapons at their 1986 summit in Reykjavik. They ultimately failed to achieve that goal but did lay the groundwork for the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Tragically, the Cold War architecture of arms control has largely been dismantled. We need to honor these Cold War accomplishments by deescalating tensions, restoring guardrails, and beginning new negotiations for a world free of all nuclear weapons. Please send this message to Congress by supporting SJ0002

ABOUT PREVENT NUCLEAR WAR MARYLAND

We are Marylanders working to reduce the threat of nuclear war by organizing a groundswell of Maryland citizens and organizations to support 1) the national Back from the Brink Call to Prevent Nuclear War; 2) similar resolutions at the state and local government levels; and 3) increase support for UN Treaty to abolish nuclear weapons.