

**Suggestions to advance NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION and Disarmament at the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly: \ UNGA Opening Session\ SEPT 26 HIGH LEVEL MEETING on the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, and UNGA First Committee**

**PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT  
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT  
ABOLITION 2000 NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION WORKING GROUP  
WORLD FUTURE COUNCIL**

**Dear Delegates:**

The following are suggestions and talking points to advance nuclear risk reduction and disarmament at the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York in September/October, including at the Opening Session of the UNGA, at the High Level Meeting on the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on Sept 26<sup>th</sup>, and at UN General Assembly First Committee.

**In particular, we encourage all delegations to affirm the Reagan/Gorbachev dictum that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, support the adoption by nuclear armed states of no-first-use policies as an important measure to reduce the risk of a nuclear war and as a transformational measure to pave the way for more comprehensive nuclear disarmament, and affirm the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons no later than 2045, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN.**

**1) The risk of nuclear war is now as high as it has ever been.** According to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Doomsday Clock, whose hands are set after discussions between nuclear weapons experts, including 13 nobel prize laureates:

“In the past year, countries with nuclear weapons continued to spend vast sums on nuclear modernisation programs, even as they allowed proven risk-reduction achievements in arms control and diplomacy to wither or die. Nuclear weapons and weapons-delivery platforms capable of carrying either nuclear or conventional warheads continued to proliferate, while destabilising “advances” in the space and cyber realms, in hypersonic missiles, and in missile defences continued. Governments in the United States, Russia, and other countries appear to consider nuclear weapons more-and-more usable, increasing the risks of their actual use. There continues to be an extraordinary disregard for the potential of an accidental nuclear war, even as well-documented examples of frighteningly close calls have emerged.”

[<https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>]

And:

“US and Russian nuclear modernisation efforts continued to accelerate, and North Korea, China, India, and Pakistan pursued “improved” and larger nuclear forces. Some of these modernisation programs are beginning to field weapons with dangerous enhancements, like Russia’s nuclear-tipped Avangard

hypersonic glide vehicles, which are being installed on new SS-29 (Sarmat) missiles designed to replace 1980s-era intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Russia continues to field battalions of intermediate-range, ground-launched, nuclear-armed missiles—missiles previously banned by the now-defunct Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, from which the United States withdrew in 2019. China, which has historically relied on a small and constrained nuclear arsenal, is expanding its capabilities and deploying multiple, independently re-targetable warheads on some of its ICBMs and will likely add more in the coming year.”[Ibid]

In letters to leaders of the ‘P5’, the Elders (Zeid Raad Al Hussein, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Hina Jilani, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Ban Ki-moon, Ricardo Lagos, Graça Machel, Mary Robinson, Juan Manuel Santos, and Ernesto Zedillo) expressed alarm that the breakdown of arms control agreements, the emergence of additional nuclear states and the resurgence of geopolitical tensions have significantly increased the risks of nuclear catastrophe.

[\[https://theelders.org/sites/default/files/newsarticaledocument/2020-08-05-PRESS-RELEASE-The%20Elders%20call%20on%20world%20leaders%20to%20take%20action%20or%20risk%20nuclear%20catastrophe.pdf\]](https://theelders.org/sites/default/files/newsarticaledocument/2020-08-05-PRESS-RELEASE-The%20Elders%20call%20on%20world%20leaders%20to%20take%20action%20or%20risk%20nuclear%20catastrophe.pdf)

Unmentioned by the Doomsday Clock authors (because it took place after the above paras were written) is the 'unfortunate' decision by the UK to increase the ceiling on its nuclear arsenal, setting into reverse its NPT commitment to decrease its nuclear arsenal. It has been argued that this is in violation of the UK's Art VI NPT commitment. So too is the deployment by the US of submarine-launched 'mini' nuclear weapons – an idea that even fails to make much military sense. The revelations of the construction of hundreds of missile silos in China, unless accounted for otherwise, would face similar criticism.

**2) Risk Reduction** is therefore a topic that is of literally 'life and death' (existential) significance. **The possibility of global nuclear war is without doubt the most potent and immediate threat to civilisation** – even including the threat posed by pandemics.

The current skyrocketing of nuclear risk must be on the top of the agendas of every delegate to First Committee, and the 26<sup>th</sup> Sept High Level Meeting, and is central to the very purpose of both First Committee and the High Level Meeting.

Indeed, the Sept 26<sup>th</sup> High Level meeting itself commemorates the time when on Sept 26th 1983, accidental nuclear war was prevented only by the decisions taken by a single, heroic, individual, namely Colonel Stanislav Petrov. There may not always be a Colonel Petrov on duty to ensure things do not escalate uncontrollably.

Whatever one thinks of the advisability of eliminating (or trying to eliminate) nuclear weapons - which sheer common sense would suggest is the best way to eliminate the risks from those weapons - there can be no question that there is a need to decrease the immediate - term risks of nuclear war, and/or 'advertent' or in-advertent nuclear weapons use, via malice, madness, miscalculation, malfunction or malware.

3) It is arguable that in May 2021, with Russian troops advancing toward the border of Ukraine in the wake of a Ukrainian advance toward Donbass, and with the

imminent possibility of a Russia-NATO military confrontation, we may have 'dodged a bullet'. There was much speculation at the time as to the likelihood of escalation toward a nuclear exchange.

It is widely held that in 2014, when Crimea was annexed to Russia, Russia violated the 1994 Budapest Memorandum which assured the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for its accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear state.

4) The reaffirmation of the Reagan-Gorbachev joint statement in the Putin-Biden joint statement on strategic stability is therefore highly welcome. All delegations should make this point.

[<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5658>]

[<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/16/u-s-russia-presidential-joint-statement-on-strategic-stability/>]

5) A range of nuclear risk reduction measures is possible, and all or any of them if truly implemented will be helpful. They include de-alerting, increased transparency, improved mil to mil communication (hotlines), avoidance of provocative military exercises and movements (as of last may), and **No First Use**.

6) Two Governments already have policies and postures of **No First Use** - India and China. When India and China clashed not so long ago over their long and ill-defined Himalayan border region, though the clash generated much ill-feeling and some loss of life, at no time was nuclear war on the agenda. This is in contrast to the situation with respect to Ukraine, where the possibility of a clash between Russia and NATO led to deep concern over potential nuclear escalation (see point 3).

7) When President Biden was President Obama's vice president, he made his support for **No First Use** quite clear. **NFU** is in the Democrat policy platform. Rep. Adam Smith has introduced legislation in support of a **No First Use** policy, in the US House of representatives, and Elizabeth Warren has introduced identical legislation in the US Senate, stating that, "It is the policy of the United States not to use nuclear weapons first." Recognition and welcome of this by non-US Governments would be helpful.

[<https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-smith-colleagues-introduce-no-first-use-bill-for-nuclear-weapons>]

8) **No First Use** would decrease the importance of nuclear weapons in security policies. By doing so it would make their elimination, as per NPT Art VI requirements, easier.

Closely related to **No First Use** is the policy of '**Sole Purpose**', under which the sole purpose of a nuclear arsenal is to deter the use of nuclear weapons. **NFU** and '**Sole Purpose**' are sometimes treated interchangeably. President Biden uses the formulation, "the sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be deterring—and if necessary, retaliating against—a nuclear attack." Whatever one may say about nuclear retaliation, this is a **NFU** policy since it explicitly rules out first use.

9) In principle, if in a confrontation between any two countries, it is known that each country has both a doctrine and a 'built - in' posture of **No First Use**, (or '**Sole Purpose**') the likelihood of that confrontation escalating to nuclear weapons use

will be low to zero. On the contrary, confrontations between countries that do NOT each have **NFU** postures and policies (e.g., Russia/NATO, or India-Pakistan - though India has an **NFU** policy, Pakistan has an emphatic '**First Use**' policy) carry a substantial risk of uncontrollable escalation to nuclear weapons use.

A guide to **No First Use** can be found at:

[<https://nofirstuse.global/why-no-first-use/>]

A guide to broader risk reduction measures including **No First Use** can be found at:

[<https://www.abolition2000.org/en/working-groups/nuclear-risk-reduction/>]

**10) No First Use or Sole Purpose** policies are important not only to reduce the risk of nuclear war, but also to pave the way for comprehensive nuclear disarmament. As long as the role of nuclear weapons includes addressing a range of threats from other WMD, conventional weapons and even cyber-attacks, the nuclear armed states will not agree to nuclear disarmament negotiations. Once nuclear armed state states have restricted the role of nuclear weapons to deterring from other nuclear weapons, then they are able to join such negotiations and support a framework for verified elimination.

A timeframe for this would be very helpful to ensure sufficient political will for success. In conjunction with the adoption of **No First Use** policies, nuclear armed and allied states should affirm the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons to be achieved no later than 2045, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN.

**Delegations to First Committee are accordingly urged to:**

**--Prioritise the spike in nuclear risks and the need for risk reduction in their opening statements;**

**--Prioritise the need for No First Use (and/or Sole Purpose) postures and policies in their opening statements;**

**--Commit to the global elimination of nuclear weapons no later than 2045.**

We hope and trust this is useful,

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