



Speaking Peace to Power

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Nuclear Weapons

With the war in Ukraine, we are once again facing the prospect of nuclear war, with the resulting catastrophes for humanity.

In March of 1963, President Kennedy spoke of the risk that by 1970, the US President might be faced with a world with as many as 25 nuclear-armed nations. He said, "I regard that as the greatest possible danger and hazard." Because other national leaders saw what Kennedy saw, by the late 1960s the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) was open for signature. By then, 5 nations were known to have nuclear weapons.

Recognizing that the NPT would serve no purpose without broad participation, and that the community of nations would never accept an arrangement which allowed open-ended possession of nuclear weapons for 5 nations while permanently prohibiting them to the rest, the NPT (in its Article VI) requires the nuclear five to negotiate their own nuclear disarmament "at an early date."

Fifty years have gone by. The NPT has slowed nuclear proliferation, but hasn't stopped it. Why is that? Because, while in words each of the original 5 steadfastly commit to disarmament, in deed all 5 still have nukes and will as far into the future as the eye can see. Many national governments think the deeds count more than the words.

Now 9 nations have nuclear weapons, and if the United States and the others among the original 5 don't disarm, nuclear proliferation won't stop at 9. It is vital that every president of the United States, and everyone with serious thoughts of becoming president, understand this reality, and the risk of nuclear war which follows from it.

We recognize that to get from where we are now to abolition of nuclear weapons will be a long, difficult process. There are important steps along that road which the United States can and should take now.

At Geneva in 1985, Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev said "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." It follows that any nation which is first to use a nuclear weapon as an act of war will not accomplish its military purpose, but will initiate a global disaster. We must never become that nation. We need to establish and announce a national policy that says so. It's called No First Use, or NFU.

China and India have adopted NFU. Two similar bills, S. 1148 and S. 1219, in the current Congress would establish an NFU policy for the United States. We ask that you cosponsor these two bills.