# Resolved: The United States should adopt a declaratory nuclear policy of no first use.

# Pro

### Definitions

#### Declaratory nuclear policy of “No First Use”

Panda 18

Ankit Panda (writer at CFR), Council on Foreign Relations, "‘No First Use’ and Nuclear Weapons", 7/17/18, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/no-first-use-and-nuclear-weapons> -CD

A so-called NFU pledge, first publicly made by China in 1964, refers to any authoritative statement by a nuclear weapon state to never be the first to use these weapons in a conflict, reserving them strictly to retaliate in the aftermath of a nuclear attack against its territory or military personnel. These pledges are a component of nuclear declaratory policies.

### Framework

#### Cost benefit analysis

The framing for today’s round ought to be cost benefit analysis. If we demonstrate that a declaratory nuclear policy of no first use would do more good than harm, we should win the round.

### Contention 1: Deproliferation

#### NFU is the de facto international standard anyways – making it declaratory would improve deproliferation efforts and soothe international tensions

Tannenwald 19

Nina Tannenwald (Author at the Texas National Security Review), Texas National Security Review, "It’s Time for a U.S. No-First-Use Nuclear Policy", 8/1/19, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/its-time-for-a-u-s-no-first-use-nuclear-policy/> -CD

A second theoretical perspective, “liberal institutionalism,” emphasizes the role of rules and institutions, both domestic and international, in stabilizing expectations and behavior. According to this theory, even if no-first-use pledges are unenforceable, they are not necessarily meaningless. To be meaningful, an NFU pledge must be built into domestic institutions, that is, the structure of operational military capabilities.7 A genuine NFU policy would require that nuclear forces be consistent with an “assured retaliation” posture that eschews counterforce objectives — the ability to destroy an adversary’s nuclear arsenal before it is launched. This perspective thus emphasizes the value of an NFU pledge in structuring operational forces to make them smaller and less threatening. When Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, soon after entering office in 1961, sent a directive to the Joint Chiefs of Staff about strategic force requirements, he stated that the first assumption shaping requirements was that “we will not strike first with such weapons.”8 McNamara’s directive was undoubtedly partly an effort to stem Air Force demands for a first-strike capability and the vast procurement of weaponry it would require. This directive, in effect, repudiated the extended deterrent doctrine that the United States would respond to a Soviet conventional attack in Europe with nuclear weapons. At the international level, liberal institutionalists emphasize the value of rules and institutions to prevent nuclear war. They argue that NFU has become a de facto norm anyway and therefore should be declared publicly and multilaterally. As Morton Halperin, who later became deputy assistant secretary of defense for arms control, wrote as early as 1961, “There now exists a powerful informal rule against the use of nuclear weapons,” and it would be advantageous to the United States to transform this tacit understanding into a formal agreement.9 Indeed, the “negative security assurances” first issued by the United States and the other P5 countries in 1978 and renewed periodically — commitments to non-nuclear states that are members of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against them — already constitute a partial NFU regime. Liberal institutionalists would also point out that constantly touting the value of a nuclear threat for security sends signals that nuclear weapons are useful and undermines nonproliferation goals.10 Finally, constructivists, who focus on the role of norms, identity, and discourse, emphasize that a declared NFU policy is an important way to strengthen norms of nuclear restraint and the nearly 74-year tradition of non-use. Strong statements from leaders about the need to avoid using nuclear weapons can help reduce tensions, just as irresponsible tweets can increase them. In the constructivist view, an NFU policy is also a diplomatic tool that can be used to signal that a state is a responsible nuclear power. As Modi recently put it, “India is a very responsible state. We are the only country to have a declared NFU [sic]. It’s not because of world pressure, but because of our own ethos. We will not move away from this, whichever government comes to power.”11 Indeed, India’s NFU pledge has proved useful for portraying Pakistan as a relatively irresponsible custodian of its nuclear arsenal. Likewise, Indian leaders use their NFU pledge as a way to resist pressures to sign any treaties that would restrict India’s nuclear arsenal.

#### Other countries use US nuclear posture as justification for proliferation, an NFU policy would end that

Carter 19

Jeff Carter (Jeff Carter is Executive Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility.), Institute for Public Accuracy, "No First Use: "It Makes the World Safer"", 8/9/19, <http://accuracy.org/release/no-first-use-it-makes-the-world-safer/> -CD

Warren reiterated her support for a ‘No First Use’ policy on nuclear weapons, stating, ‘It makes the world safer. The United States is not going to use nuclear weapons preemptively, and we need to say so to the entire world.’ Warren is the original sponsor of No First Use legislation in the Senate (S. 272). Physicians for Social Responsibility welcomes discussion of a nuclear ‘No First Use’during a presidential debate. This is a matter of public health and safety, and it’s also a matter of the United States’ moral and political position on the global stage. This is not a partisan issue, and it affects all of us. . . . “Establishing an official U.S. policy of No First Use of nuclear weapons would provide critical stability and serve as an essential step to preventing potential nuclear conflict. Right now, the United States has withdrawn from almost every multilateral nuclear arms treaty that effectively provided critical verification of arms reduction and helped prevent a new nuclear arms race. Meanwhile, the risk of nuclear war is greater than it’s been since the height of the Cold War. Nuclear weapons make us less safe, not more. Establishing a policy of No First Use puts us back on track and pulls us back from the brink of nuclear war. “Most Americans don’t want our nation to start a nuclear war; in fact, most Americans think we already have an official policy that we will never start a nuclear war. It’s time to make No First Use a reality. Doing so will signal the seriousness of our commitment to nuclear nonproliferation, and our seriousness of our intent to prevent a nuclear war from ever occurring. It will send a strong signal to other nuclear-armed countries and to those with the potential to develop nuclear arsenals. When the United States adopts a No First Use policy, this may motivate other nuclear-armed nations to follow suit. People in other nations justify their nuclear buildups by pointing to U.S. policies to ‘keep all options on the table.’ A U.S. declared No First Use policy would remove that justification.”

### Contention 2: Prevents nuclear war

#### Preventing a nuclear war with an NFU policy outweighs any benefits from an ambiguous nuclear posture

Tannenwald 19

Nina Tannenwald (Author at the Texas National Security Review), Texas National Security Review, "It’s Time for a U.S. No-First-Use Nuclear Policy", 8/1/19, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/its-time-for-a-u-s-no-first-use-nuclear-policy/> -CD

Beginning in the early days of the Cold War, the United States has relied on the threat to use nuclear weapons first as a way to deter both nuclear and non-nuclear attacks. Yet, the world has changed significantly since then. In the contemporary era, the dangers and risks of a first-strike policy outweigh the hoped-for deterrence benefits. The United States should join China and India in adopting a declared no-first-use policy and should encourage the other nuclear-armed states to do likewise. A no-first-use policy means that the United States would pledge to use nuclear weapons only in retaliation for a nuclear attack. The sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons would then be to deter — and, if necessary, respond to — the use of nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies and partners. To be credible, this declaratory pledge would need to be reflected in a retaliatory-strike-only nuclear force posture. The most important goal for the United States today should be to prevent the use of nuclear weapons. Since the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 — the only use of nuclear weapons in warfare — it has established a nearly 74-year tradition of not using nuclear weapons. This tradition is the single most important fact of the nuclear age. Today, the risks of nuclear war are increasing. Heightened geopolitical tensions, a more complex calculus of deterrence in a multipolar nuclear world, renewed reliance on nuclear weapons, technological arms races in nuclear and non-nuclear systems, the collapse of arms control, and the return of nuclear brinkmanship have all resulted in highly dangerous deterrence policies that, through miscalculation or accident, could plunge the United States into a nuclear war with North Korea, Russia, or China. The nuclear-armed states urgently need to step back from this dangerous situation by adopting a no-first-use policy that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war.

#### A NFU policy calms international tensions and would prevent a nuclear catastrophe

Blair 18

Bruce Blair (a nuclear security expert and a research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs) and Jon Wolfsthal (an American national security consultant, government appointee, and columnist.), The Washington Post, "Pretending we could win a nuclear war is a dangerous fantasy.", 8/1/19, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/01/we-still-cant-win-nuclear-war-pretending-we-could-is-dangerous-fantasy/> -CD

A small but influential sect of true believers in nuclear warfighting often dismiss “no first use” as an agenda promoted by arms control or disarmament advocates. While a pledge not to use nuclear weapons first would open up new avenues for constructive arms control, the idea is not driven by peacenik impulses, but by a clear-eyed expert assessment of the risks incurred by first use and the benefits of maintaining a deterrent posture that eschews it. Forswearing first use would not only enhance stability but also could enable smarter investments in nuclear weapons, stabilize nuclear crises, raise the threshold of nuclear use, reduce the risk of initiating a nuclear strike on the basis of faulty intelligence, and open up a new avenue for controlling the dangerous and accelerating nuclear competition between Washington and Moscow. If the next president adopts this policy, they could then push the leaders of every other nuclear-armed state to do so (India and China already have). Anything less threatens to undermine the fragile logic of deterrence and could result in a nuclear catastrophe the world had hoped was left behind in the history books.

### Extra Cards

#### A NFU policy reduces the risk of nuclear war through miscalculation by other countries

Tannenwald 19

Nina Tannenwald (Author at the Texas National Security Review), Texas National Security Review, "It’s Time for a U.S. No-First-Use Nuclear Policy", 8/1/19, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/its-time-for-a-u-s-no-first-use-nuclear-policy/> -CD

As Kingston Reif and Daryl Kimball of the Arms Control Association have argued, “a clear U.S. no-first-use policy would reduce the risk of Russian or Chinese nuclear miscalculation during a crisis by alleviating concerns about a devastating U.S. nuclear first-strike.”24 This would mean that the United States would rely on nuclear weapons only to deter nuclear attacks. Adopting this approach would involve more than “cheap talk,” for it would require meaningful doctrinal and operational changes.25 Specifically, it would allow the United States to adopt a less threatening nuclear posture. It would eliminate first-strike postures, preemptive capabilities, and other types of destabilizing warfighting strategies. It would emphasize restraint in targeting, launch-on-warning, alert levels of deployed systems, procurement, and modernization plans. In other words, it would help shape the physical qualities of nuclear forces in a way that renders them unsuitable for missions other than deterrence of nuclear attacks.

#### US nuclear posture is becoming increasingly belligerent

Blair 18

Bruce Blair (a nuclear security expert and a research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs) and Jon Wolfsthal (an American national security consultant, government appointee, and columnist.), The Washington Post, "Pretending we could win a nuclear war is a dangerous fantasy.", 8/1/19, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/01/we-still-cant-win-nuclear-war-pretending-we-could-is-dangerous-fantasy/> -CD

For nearly five decades, the Cold War nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union threatened to unleash a devastating nuclear war at almost any time. The worst danger came when officials on both sides argued that a nuclear war could be fought, and sought the means to win such a conflict. Alarmingly, the idea of nuclear warfighting is back in vogue under the current administration. It must again be rejected. Nuclear catastrophe was avoided then largely because Washington and Moscow both eventually recognized that if an opponent had nuclear forces that survived a strike, they could respond to a nuclear attack with their own and inflict unacceptable damage on the aggressor. This was the essence of mutually assured destruction (MAD) and the cornerstone of true deterrence. It is why President Ronald Reagan declared in his 1985 State of the Union address that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” — opening the door to real arms control and nuclear reductions with Russia that are now very much at risk. Now, as then, nuclear believers like those in the Trump administration looked for ways to eclipse MAD with capabilities for fighting and winning a nuclear war. Key to these nuclear warfighting mind-sets is the idea of “escalation dominance,” where one side thinks it can use nuclear weapons but somehow prevent the other side from doing the same. This conceit increasingly drives U.S. nuclear policy. President Trump and his advisers have strongly embraced this risky set of policies and seek new, “low-yield” nuclear weapons to make these threats easier to carry out. These concepts of escalation dominance and nuclear warfighting are dangerous fantasies. It is illogical and baseless to believe that a U.S. nuclear weapon could be used first against another nuclear-armed country without provoking a catastrophic nuclear counterattack. For 11 minutes (out of 300) during the two Democratic presidential debates this week, moderators addressed the critically important issue of nuclear war. CNN’s Jake Tapper asked Sen. Elizabeth Warren on Tuesday why she supported ending the dangerous Cold War idea of threatening to use nuclear weapons first. Warren, and a growing number of Democratic leaders in Congress, want to rule out first use of nuclear weapons because they want to make clear that fighting and “winning” a nuclear war is impossible. In reality, any first use of nuclear weapons against another nuclear-armed nation would yield a devastating response that vastly outweighs any perceived benefit of attacking first. That makes deterrence via retaliation the only credible role for U.S. nuclear weapons — pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons globally. The hard tasks of fighting and winning wars must remain in the conventional and other nonnuclear arenas. Far from providing security, increasing our reliance on the first use of nuclear weapons makes nuclear conflict more likely. Getting rid of first use would make us safer.

#### Nuclear postures which include first use offer no unique strategic benefits over a NFU posture

Blair 18

Bruce Blair (a nuclear security expert and a research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs) and Jon Wolfsthal (an American national security consultant, government appointee, and columnist.), The Washington Post, "Pretending we could win a nuclear war is a dangerous fantasy.", 8/1/19, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/01/we-still-cant-win-nuclear-war-pretending-we-could-is-dangerous-fantasy/> -CD

Adopting a nuclear No-First-Use (NFU) policy would be a straightforward way to nip this resurgent warfighting idea in the bud, enhancing U.S. and allied security and global stability. Calls for such a policy — one that clearly states that the United States will never be the first to use nuclear weapons — are growing. Warren has endorsed NFU, and former vice president Joe Biden championed a sole-purpose pledge that would make deterrence — presumably by retaliation and not first use — the only mission for U.S. nuclear forces. Making such a policy law over the objections of any president is probably politically impossible, but opinion surveys show NFU enjoys overwhelming public support. The fact that the issue came up at the debate shows that an overdue policy discussion about reducing the threat of nuclear weapons has cracked open. Threatening the first use of nuclear weapons is not necessary, beneficial or credible. Russia and China possess secure second-strike forces capable of absorbing any first strike and retaliating ferociously against the United States or its allies. North Korea’s reliance on mobile missiles and underground tunnels means it would probably be able to respond to even a large-scale attack. And the reality is that the United States and its allies in NATO and East Asia can rule out nuclear first use because our conventional military forces can defeat any nuclear or nonnuclear adversary. For proof, look at how Russia has invoked nuclear threats in the face of our conventional capabilities. Moscow does not doubt our nuclear capabilities; they doubt their own conventional forces and compensate by issuing nuclear threats. A thoughtful president would not even consider nuclear first use unless he or she was certain that the underlying intelligence supporting an attack was foolproof, that only nuclear weapons and not conventional or cyber weapons could do the job, that losses to innocent civilians would be “acceptable,” and that first use would not escalate to cataclysmic proportions. Perhaps some armchair strategist can spin up such far-fetched conditions, but in the real world, it just doesn’t hold up.

#### The threat of US nuclear first use is specific and catastrophic enough to outweigh speculatory claims about unknown agents using biological or chemical weapons

Blair 18

Bruce Blair (a nuclear security expert and a research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs) and Jon Wolfsthal (an American national security consultant, government appointee, and columnist.), The Washington Post, "Pretending we could win a nuclear war is a dangerous fantasy.", 8/1/19, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/01/we-still-cant-win-nuclear-war-pretending-we-could-is-dangerous-fantasy/> -CD

If the United States were to use nuclear weapons to respond to nonnuclear attacks, it would also lose the ability to rally global support to punish the attacking country. Even our staunchest allies would rightly be horrified. There are no credible contingencies where the first use of nuclear weapons would serve the immediate and long-term national security interest of the United States or its allies. No one can say with 100 percent certainty that the threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation in response to chemical or biological attacks might not inhibit an adversary from using these weapons. And no one can claim conclusively that without nuclear threats, such weapons would be used more widely. But the theoretical possibility that nuclear coercion against chemical or biological threats might work must be weighed against the real, quantifiable and significant risks of threatening nuclear first use — and the dire humanitarian, environmental, economic, strategic and moral consequences of actual use. Policy should flow from that analysis, not imaginary scenarios resting on fantastical assumptions meant to minimize the risks and maximize the potential benefits.

# Con

### Definitions

#### Declaratory nuclear policy of “No First Use”

Panda 18

Ankit Panda (writer at CFR), Council on Foreign Relations, "‘No First Use’ and Nuclear Weapons", 7/17/18, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/no-first-use-and-nuclear-weapons> -CD

A so-called NFU pledge, first publicly made by China in 1964, refers to any authoritative statement by a nuclear weapon state to never be the first to use these weapons in a conflict, reserving them strictly to retaliate in the aftermath of a nuclear attack against its territory or military personnel. These pledges are a component of nuclear declaratory policies.

### Framework

#### Cost benefit analysis

The framing for today’s round ought to be cost benefit analysis. If we demonstrate that the costs of adopting a declaratory nuclear policy of no first use would outweigh the benefits, we should win the round.

### Contention 1: Deterrence via ambiguity

#### Ambiguous nuclear first use policies deter all forms of aggression from adversaries

DoD 19

“Dangers of a Nuclear No First Use Policy,” U.S. Department of Defense, April 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Apr/01/2002108002/-1/-1/1/DANGERS-OF-A-NO-FIRST-USE-POLICY.PDF>. -CD

Advocates argue that a U.S. no first use policy would reduce the risk of nuclear war. However, adoption of such a policy could increase the likelihood of devastating conflict, including one that escalates to nuclear war, by incentivizing non-nuclear strategic attack on, and coercion of, the U.S. or our allies and partners. Such a policy may change how adversaries and allies view the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent and our resolve to use it when our vital interests are threatened. Operational scenarios exist in which the U.S. would consider first use. Retaining a degree of ambiguity and refraining from a no first use policy creates uncertainty in the mind of potential adversaries and reinforces deterrence of aggression by ensuring adversaries cannot predict what specific actions will lead to a U.S. nuclear response. Implementing a no first use policy could undermine the U.S. ability to deter Russian, Chinese, and North Korean aggression, especially with respect to their growing capability to carry out nonnuclear strategic attacks.

### Contention 2: Enables conventional aggression

#### NFU policies would enable conventional, chemical, and biological warfare, which may serve as kindling for nuclear escalation

Woolf 19

Amy F. Woolf (Specialist in Nuclear Weapons Policy at the CRS), "U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy: Considering 'No First Use,'" Congressional Research Service, March 1, 2019. -CD

Although the United States does not rule out the first use of nuclear weapons, the absence of a “no first use” pledge is less about the perceived need to employ these weapons first in a conflict than it is about the view that the threat of nuclear escalation continues to serve as a deterrent to large-scale conventional war or the use of chemical and biological weapons. Supporters of the current policy argue that removing the threat of nuclear escalation could embolden countries like North Korea, China, or Russia, who might believe that they could overwhelm U.S. allies in their regions and take advantage of local or regional conventional advantages before the United States or its allies could respond. In such a scenario, some argue, the “no first use” pledge would not only undermine deterrence, but could also increase the risk that a conventional war could escalate and involve nuclear weapons use. Moreover, because the United States has pledged to use all means necessary, including nuclear weapons, to defend allies in Europe and Asia, this change in U.S. declaratory policy could undermine allies’ confidence in the U.S. commitment to their defense and possibly spur them to acquire their own nuclear weapons. As a result, in this view, a “no first use” policy could undermine U.S. nuclear nonproliferation goals.

### Contention 3: Assurance

#### Current US nuclear posture forms a critical pillar in ally assurance

DoD 18

Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense, "Nuclear Posture Review", February 2018, https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/18/2002302062/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF -CD

The United States has extended nuclear deterrence commitments that assure European, Asian, and Pacific allies. The United States will ensure the credibility and effectiveness of those commitments. Assurance is a common goal and advances our common security interests. It is based on collaboration with allies and partners to deter or defeat the threats we face. It includes sustained allied dialogues to understand each other’s threat perceptions and to arrive at a shared understanding of how best to demonstrate our collective capabilities and resolve. No country should doubt the strength of our extended deterrence commitments or the strength of U.S. and allied capabilities to deter, or if necessary defeat, any potential adversary’s nuclear or non-nuclear aggression. In many cases, effectively assuring allies and partners depends on their confidence in the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. They have reaffirmed that extended nuclear deterrence is essential to their security, enabling most to eschew possession of nuclear weapons and thereby contributing to U.S. non-proliferation goals.

#### Allies (particularly our allies in Asia) depend on the current nuclear first use policy as an ultimate security guarantee

Kaplan 19

Fred Kaplan (Kaplan is an American author and journalist. His weekly "War Stories" column for Slate magazine covers international relations and U.S. foreign policy.), Slate, "Nuclear first use: Elizabeth Warren and Steve Bullock barely got into the fascinating and terrifying debate over nuclear deterrence.", 7/31/19, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/07/nuclear-no-first-use-elizabeth-warren-steve-bullock.html -CD

President Barack Obama tried to break that barrier. He entered the White House pledging to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons” in U.S. security. One way to do that, in the minds of many arms-control advocates (some of whom were working on his staff), was to declare a policy of no first use. In the fall and winter of 2009, Obama held a few behind-closed-door meetings to debate the idea. Those in favor argued that a first-use policy was no longer necessary. The Cold War was over, the Soviet Union was gone, the new Russia (still fairly supine and eager for cooperation with the West at that point) wasn’t going to invade Europe; and if some conflict did take place, the new generation of U.S. high-tech conventional weapons—GPS-guided drones and smart bombs, which exploded with pinpoint accuracy—could destroy targets that only nukes could have leveled in decades past. Finally, proponents argued, if the U.S. declared that it no longer found the bomb useful except as a second-strike deterrent, maybe other countries would steer clear of the nuclear genie. Top officials in the State Department and the Pentagon opposed the idea. So did U.S. allies, especially those in Asia, who still counted on the nuclear umbrella as the ultimate security guarantee. (When news leaked that Obama was just considering a no-first-use policy, Japan swiftly sent emissaries to Washington to plead the case against the idea.) Secretary of Defense Robert Gates also raised the threat of a massive biological attack. The U.S. had long ago disposed of its own bioweapons, so it couldn’t “retaliate in kind” if another country struck first. Certainly, Gates argued, a president would at least want to consider responding to such a hideous attack with nuclear weapons. Therefore, we should make that possibility clear to all potential aggressors from the outset—in order to deter them from contemplating an attack. Why, he asked, should we box ourselves in unilaterally?

### Extra Cards

#### US policy towards nuclear use

DoD 18

Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense, "Nuclear Posture Review", February 2018, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/18/2002302062/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF> -CD

An important element of maintaining effective deterrence is the articulation of U.S. declaratory policy regarding the potential employment of nuclear weapons: The United States would only consider the employment of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners. Extreme circumstances could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks. Significant non-nuclear strategic attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on the U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control, or warning and attack assessment capabilities. The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations. Given the potential of significant non-nuclear strategic attacks, the United States reserves the right to make any adjustment in the assurance that may be warranted by the evolution and proliferation of non-nuclear strategic attack technologies and U.S. capabilities to counter that threat. To help preserve deterrence and the assurance of allies and partners, the United States has never adopted a “no first use” policy and, given the contemporary threat environment, such a policy is not justified today. It remains the policy of the United States to retain some ambiguity regarding the precise circumstances that might lead to a U.S. nuclear response. In addition, the United States will maintain a portion of its nuclear forces on alert day-to- day, and retain the option of launching those forces promptly. This posture maximizes decision time and preserves the range of U.S. response options. It also makes clear to potential adversaries that they can have no confidence in strategies intended to destroy our nuclear deterrent forces in a surprise first strike.

#### The US does not keep its ICBMs (nuclear or otherwise) on a “hair-trigger alert”

DoD 18

Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense, "Nuclear Posture Review", February 2018, https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/18/2002302062/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF -CD

The de-alerting of U.S. ICBMs would create the potential for dangerous deterrence instabilities by rendering them vulnerable to a potential first strike and compelling the United States to rush to re-alert in a crisis or conflict. Further, U.S. ICBMs are not on “hair-trigger alert,” as sometimes mistakenly is claimed. As the bipartisan 2009 Perry- Schlesinger Commission report stated, hair trigger alert “is simply an erroneous characterization of the issue. The alert postures of both countries [the United States and the Russian Federation] are in fact highly stable. They are subject to multiple layers of control, ensuring clear civilian and indeed Presidential decision-making.” Over more than half a century, the U.S. has established a series of measures and protocols to ensure that ICBMs are safe, secure, and under constant control. Any U.S. decision to employ nuclear weapons would follow a deliberative process. Finally, the United States will continue its long-standing practice of open-ocean targeting of its strategic nuclear forces day-to-day as a confidence and security building measure.

#### Current US nuclear posture includes specific and sufficient restrictions on first use

Kaplan 19

Fred Kaplan (Kaplan is an American author and journalist. His weekly "War Stories" column for Slate magazine covers international relations and U.S. foreign policy.), Slate, "Nuclear first use: Elizabeth Warren and Steve Bullock barely got into the fascinating and terrifying debate over nuclear deterrence.", 7/31/19, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/07/nuclear-no-first-use-elizabeth-warren-steve-bullock.html -CD

According to several officials who took part in these meetings, Obama thought—and said—that no president in his right mind would use nuclear weapons first. However, he also thought Gates’ arguments had merit; he had no desire to make Japan and other allies nervous about America’s commitments; and, to the surprise of some of his aides (and the relief of the generals), he, like Gates, saw no point in unilateral gestures. At the same time, he wanted to make it clear—to his own people and to the rest of the world—that the U.S. would use nukes first under only extremely limited circumstances. He came up with this formula: The United States would not use nuclear weapons first against countries that (a) did not possess nuclear weapons and (b) had signed, and were abiding by, the Non-Proliferation Treaty. This preserved the option of going first against what many considered the main threats—Russia, China, North Korea, and (if it ever developed a bomb, as it seemed to be doing at the time) Iran. That became U.S. policy—and, though few noticed, the Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review, signed in 2018 by then–Secretary of Defense James Mattis, preserved that language precisely.

#### An ambiguous nuclear first use policy deters conventional, chemical, and biological warfare

Tertrais 18

Bruno Tertrais (Deputy Director of Strategic Foresight for Asia), STRAFASIA, "No First Use, No Deterrence", 10/7/19, <https://strafasia.com/no-first-use-no-deterrence/> -CD

My second argument is that the costs of no first use are significant. One reads and hears that nuclear-armed countries do not need nuclear weapons to deter non-nuclear mass destruction when they enjoy conventional superiority over their adversaries. But nuclear weapons are special: they can obliterate a country’s vital installations in a few minutes. Because of this ability and of some of their effects (radiation), they scare leaders and populations in a way that classical weapons do not. As the saying goes, in every French village there is a monument to the failure of conventional deterrence in 1914. NFU policies signal to those adversaries who would take such a commitment seriously that they could do anything to the other party without ever facing the risk of a nuclear response, using chemical weapons against forces on a battlefield, raining down conventional ballistic missiles on homelands, or launching biological munitions against populations. NFU as a declaratory policy could bring more nuclear stability if it was adopted by both sides and believed by both sides; but it might bring more instability at the non-nuclear level. There is evidence of the value of nuclear weapons to deter the use of chemical or biological weapons. No country has ever used such means against a nuclear-armed adversary. Egypt used chemical weapons against Yemeni opponents in the 1960s, but refrained from using them against Israel. Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran in the 1980s, but did not do so against coalition forces or Israeli territory in 1991. Perhaps one does not need nuclear weapons to effectively ‘punish’ a chemical- or biological-weapons aggressor (although a nuclear response may be the best way to restore deterrence if such use has caused massive casualties). But the argument here is mostly about deterring the next use of weapons of mass destruction, not about deterring those that may come after that. As an action policy (as opposed to merely a declaratory one), a NFU commitment would be a severe impingement on what leaders cherish most in time of war: freedom of action to defend their country. It would also prevent a government which has adopted such a principle from striking preemptively at an adversary who has unmistakably demonstrated its intention to imminently launch a nuclear attack. Granted, such an extreme ‘damage limitation’ strike could only be executed in absolutely extraordinary circumstances. But it is only a slight exaggeration to say that a leader ready to forfeit it through a NFU policy is giving up the possibility of saving hundreds of thousands of his citizens. It is sometimes said that NFU is possible for Western countries since no adversary would believe that a Western leader could use nuclear weapons for less than absolutely vital contingencies. But the US reaction to 11 September – as well as opinion polls on nuclear use scenarios – should give pause to anyone thinking that democracies are weak and cannot get very angry. More importantly, the argument can be reversed: an adversary could believe that public opinion would not have the stomach for a sustained, costly conventional bombing campaign aimed at eradicating a state’s ability to function. The first-use option induces a fundamental uncertainty in the adversary’s mind: you cannot calculate in advance the maximum cost of an armed aggression against the core interests of a nuclear-capable country. Also, not only is there little if any non-proliferation benefit from NFU policies as seen above, but there would actually be costs. If allies covered by Western nuclear umbrellas saw such a policy shift as a reduction in the value of foreign protection, they could conclude that they should embark in their own nuclear programs. The first use option is at the core of nuclear deterrence. For a nuclear-armed country, to discard it is to start eroding the very credibility of deterrence for uncertain and limited benefits.