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May 13, 2019

The Honorable Jack Reed  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Reed,

We ask you to eliminate funding for and bar deployment of the new W76-2 nuclear warhead. This new weapon would have an explosive yield of about 5 kilotons and would replace some of the 100-kiloton W76-1 warheads deployed on Trident II D5 submarine-launched ballistic missiles. It is unnecessary and would increase the risk of miscalculation and wider nuclear use. The Administration's FY2020 proposed budget includes \$26 million in DoD funding and \$10 million in DOE funding for this weapon; Congress should deny all of that request and prevent the warhead from being fielded.

There are three main reasons you should oppose this new nuclear weapon.

First, the Trump administration's case for this new warhead rests on the faulty premise that there is a "deterrence gap" with Russia. Because of this supposed "gap," the Nuclear Posture Review suggests that Russia might use a lower-yield nuclear weapon first in a conflict and assume the United States would be "self-deterred" from responding because the Pentagon lacks sufficient options with similar yields.

But there is no such gap. The U.S. nuclear arsenal has approximately 1,000 low-yield-capable weapons including several types of B61 bombs and an air-launched cruise missile that, between them, have yield options of 0.3, 1.5, 5, and 10 kilotons. In addition, the United States plans to spend in total more than \$150 billion to field a new B61-12 bomb with low-yield options, a new cruise missile and warhead with low-yield options, and a new stealth bomber and fighter aircraft to deliver these weapons.

Second, in the highly unlikely event of a Russian limited nuclear attack in a so-called "tactical" strike, there is no evidence to suggest that a limited U.S. nuclear counterstrike would end the conflict. In fact, such a response would increase the risk of further nuclear escalation.

As President Reagan's Secretary of State George Shultz testified to Congress on January 25, 2018, "The idea of a low-yield nuclear weapon is kind of a mirage. It is a nuclear weapon... [It] invites escalation."

Then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis testified before Congress in February 2018 that "I don't think there's any such thing as a tactical nuclear weapon. Any nuclear weapon used anytime is a strategic game changer."

Third, a low-yield warhead on a ballistic missile invites miscalculation that could also lead to the conflict escalating. If Russia detected an incoming Trident missile, it would not know whether it was armed with a low-yield or high-yield warhead. Based on a worst-case scenario assessment, it may feel pressured to respond quickly by launching one or more of its own nuclear-armed missiles.

It was this same concern about discrimination that led Congress to soundly reject the idea of deploying conventionally-armed Trident missiles in 2008. Congress was rightly concerned about the inability of nuclear-armed adversaries to determine whether a ballistic missile launched from a U.S. submarine was armed with a conventional or nuclear warhead. If Russia detected an incoming missile, it would have to assume it could be nuclear-armed, which could lead it to launch a nuclear weapon in response.

For these reasons, we urge you to deny funding for and bar deployment of the W76-2 Trident warhead.

Sincerely,

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