WMD: Woeful Mass Delusion
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The “No First Use” declaration sounds like a nice thing to wish for, like a policy that says every week should have five sunny days. But there are good practical reasons why it’s a bad policy and why all Presidential administrations since Eisenhower have rejected it. It reduces the deterrent threat needed to rein in bad guys on the world stage. It weakens confidence our allies have in us, reducing international strategic stability. And it increases the risk of nuclear proliferation.

Woeful Mass Delusion

“No first use” sounds nice, but there are good practical reasons why all Presidential administrations since Eisenhower have rejected it. And we urge you, as well, to deny that the United States should adopt a declaratory nuclear policy of no first use. First, let’s define what we mean. The Council on Foreign Relations published this definition of No First Use, or NFU, in 2018 QUOTE:

“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.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

There are three reasons why it’s a bad policy and we’ll outline them in 3 Contentions…

# Contention 1. Lost deterrence

You must understand that nuclear weapons are not only used to deter bad guys from using nukes on us. If that were all they were good for, they might have a case. But our nukes don’t just deter their nukes, they also deter conventional attacks and non-nuclear weapons of mass destruction like biological and chemical attacks. Nuclear weapons policy expert John R. Harvey in 2019 explained QUOTE:

“The main concern in adopting a policy of no-first-use is that it could lead an enemy to believe that it could launch a catastrophic, non-nuclear strike against the United States, its allies, or U.S. overseas forces without fear of nuclear reprisal. Consider, for example, a North Korean biological attack on an American city that kills hundreds of thousands, or an artillery bombardment of Seoul with chemical weapons, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Korean and U.S. forces and citizens. Would North Korea be more willing to contemplate such attacks if it thought it was immune to a U.S. nuclear response? Recent presidents have been unwilling to accept the risk to deterrence that would accompany a pledge of no-first-use.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

END QUOTE. So the risk of not being able to deter bad guys from horrific non-nuclear attacks outweighs any benefits of a “No first use” policy. But this quote also leads into the second problem, as we see in…

# Contention 2. Vulnerable allies.

We see this in 2 sub-points.

## A. Allies rely on US nuclear guarantees to deter threats

The Council on Foreign Relations explained in 2018 QUOTE:

“Accordingly, NATO has always opposed a U.S. NFU declaration and [has never ruled out U.S. first use](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999_07-08/jmja99) under its “flexible response” posture since 1967. Today, U.S. allies in East Asia and Europe alike rely on credible commitments from the United States to use nuclear weapons first to deter major nonnuclear threats against them.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

END QUOTE. And that guarantee is especially important right now, given the current threats. We see in Sub-point…

## B. International stability would be harmed

Gordon Chang explains in 2016 why the safety of US allies and international stability depends on opposing NFU when he says QUOTE:

“Would declaring no-first-use actually be a good idea, though? The answer is no, at least not now. Unilateral changes of this sort should be made only in times of strategic stability. At this time, America and its treaty partners are already having difficulty deterring big-state aggressors in Europe and Asia, and may need their most destructive weaponry to maintain peace and stability in troubled regions.

**[END QUOTE. HE GOES ON TO SAY LATER IN THE SAME CONTEXT, QUOTE:]**As president of the Center for Security Policy Frank Gaffney argues, though, today the West needs more than just conventional forces. He said to me in an interview that it needs to convince aggressors they can be destroyed by a first nuclear strike.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

END QUOTE. And if our allies doubt our willingness to protect them, it leads in to our…

# Contention 3. Nuclear proliferation

We see this problem in 2 sub-points.

## A. Weakened commitment motivates proliferation.

NFU, whether we intend it to or not, would signal a weakened commitment to our allies, and motivate them to develop their own nuclear weapons. Dr. John Harvey explains in 2019 QUOTE:

“Many countries, including those that share a border with an adversary that presents a threat to their very existence, see no-first-use as a weakening, symbolic or otherwise, of U.S. extended deterrence. In response to Chinese provocations in the western Pacific and North Korea’s nuclear tests and missile launches, Japan regularly seeks, both in official consultations and ongoing military cooperation, assurances that America will continue to fulfill its security commitments to protect the island nation. Some in South Korea have already pressed to [explore an increased U.S. nuclear presence](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/09/18/pentagon-chief-says-he-was-asked-about-reintroducing-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-south-korea/?utm_term=.cc112643d8a8) in their country to further deter regional threats. Loss of confidence in U.S. security commitments could cause some allies to seek accommodation with regional adversaries in ways that run counter to U.S. interests. Moreover, both South Korea and Japan, similar to many NATO allies, have latent nuclear weapons capabilities characteristic of advanced industrial economies with commercial nuclear power. Any perceived wavering of U.S. security commitments could cause allies to develop and field their own nuclear weapons.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

END QUOTE. And nuclear proliferation is bad, as we see in Subpoint…

## B. Nuclear proliferation creates multiple problems, including higher risk of nuclear war

Prof. Gary Bass explains in 2020 QUOTE:

“Nuclear proliferation today sparks a series of serious moral objections, even beyond those voiced in the Cold War. Some of these nuclear-armed states could provide nuclear technology to terrorist groups, which would result in the deaths of vast numbers of innocent civilians. Nuclear arms races cost money, which poor countries—and rich ones too—could better spend on providing public services for their people. (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto said in 1965 that if India got the bomb, then so would Pakistan “even if we have to feed on grass and leaves.”) The more nuclear states there are on a hair-trigger, the higher the chances are of an accidental launch or a blunder into an unwanted apocalypse.” [[6]](#footnote-6)

END QUOTE. And that brings us to our…

# Conclusion

NFU is supposed to reduce tensions, reduce the risk of nuclear weapons use, and increase the chances for peace. It does just the opposite. Please join us in rejecting this resolution.

1. Ankit Panda 2018 (award-winning American writer, analyst, and researcher specializing in international security, defense, geopolitics, and economics) COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS “‘No First Use’ and Nuclear Weapons” 17 July 2018 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/no-first-use-and-nuclear-weapons> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dr. John R. Harvey 2019 (PhD; retired principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear, chemical, and biological defense programs ) ASSESSING THE RISKS OF A NUCLEAR ‘NO FIRST USE’ POLICY 5 July 2019 https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/assessing-the-risks-of-a-nuclear-no-first-use-policy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ankit Panda 2018 (award-winning American writer, analyst, and researcher specializing in international security, defense, geopolitics, and economics) COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS “‘No First Use’ and Nuclear Weapons” 17 July 2018 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/no-first-use-and-nuclear-weapons> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gordon G. Chang 2016 (attorney; journalist; formerly lived in China) 27 July 2016 “Declaring a no-first-use nuclear policy would be exceedingly risky” BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS https://thebulletin.org/2016/07/declaring-a-no-first-use-nuclear-policy-would-be-exceedingly-risky/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dr. John R. Harvey 2019 (PhD; retired principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear, chemical, and biological defense programs ) ASSESSING THE RISKS OF A NUCLEAR ‘NO FIRST USE’ POLICY 5 July 2019 https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/assessing-the-risks-of-a-nuclear-no-first-use-policy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Prof. Gary J. Bass 2020 (Assistant Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University ) ETHICS April 2020 “Just and Unjust Proliferation” https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/gjbass/files/bass\_ethics.pdf* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)