



## Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

### Background on Nuclear Disarmament and Challenging Increases in Military Spending January 2020

*“There is a need to break down the climate of distrust that risks leading to a dismantling of the international arms control framework. We are witnessing an erosion of multilateralism which is all the more serious in light of the growth of new forms of military technology. Such an approach seems highly incongruous in today’s context of interconnectedness; it represents a situation that urgently calls for the attention and commitment of all leaders.”*  
-- Pope Francis, November 24, 2019 Address of the Holy Father on Nuclear Weapons, Nagasaki, Japan

#### **Background**

The United States and Russia each hold over 6,000 nuclear weapons (90% of all nuclear weapons), while the remaining nuclear powers each have less than 300. The world logically looks to the U.S. and Russia to take the lead in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology. But disputes and distrust have grown between the United States and Russia, and between nuclear and non-nuclear states, complicated by rapidly changing technologies, shifting geopolitics, and non-state actors. This reality is seen in the erosion of support for critical nuclear arms treaties over the past few years.

In May 2018 President Trump announced the U.S.’ withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 agreement signed between Iran and China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States. The JCPOA was designed to curb Iran’s development of nuclear weapons while allowing for their use of nuclear energy. On August 2, 2019, after disputes over compliance, the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia that had been in effect since 1988. The INF Treaty prohibited all U.S. and Soviet/Russian nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. A total of 2,692 short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missiles were destroyed by both countries by 1991. With the INF Treaty now defunct, both countries may redeploy these missile systems, which have shorter flight-times to their targets.

The possible demise of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) in February 2021 is raising alarm. Why? Signed in 2010, this major international agreement constrains the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and Russia by limiting the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to no more than 1,550 and strategic delivery platforms to 700. It allows 18 annual on-site inspections of facilities by the other country, and a biannual exchange of data to indicate the current state of strategic forces. If New START expires, there would be no legally binding limits on the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals for the first time since 1972.

To date, the Trump Administration has refused to respond to Russia’s offer to extend the treaty by five years without conditions. Extension can be achieved by mutual agreement by the two presidents. Instead, the Administration says it wants a new treaty with Russia, and also with China, which has never been part of a nuclear arms control negotiation. However, there is too little time to negotiate a new agreement before New START expires in February 2021. By promptly agreeing to extend New START, President Trump could keep in place verifiable limits on the Russian and U.S. arsenals, and maintain a foundation for negotiations on a more ambitious follow-on agreement.

Historically, nuclear disarmament as a security and moral concern has been supported by leaders of both major political parties. President Ronald Reagan famously argued in his 1984 State of the Union address: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?” President Barack Obama reiterated this conviction in his Prague speech of 2011: “So today,

I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly — perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence.”

Pope Francis, in his November 2019 trip to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, emphasized the Church's position on nuclear weapons. He said, “A world of peace, free from nuclear weapons, is the aspiration of millions of men and women everywhere. To make this ideal a reality calls for involvement on the part of all...There is a need to break down the climate of distrust that risks leading to a dismantling of the international arms control framework... I ask political leaders not to forget that these weapons cannot protect us from current threats to national and international security. We need to ponder the catastrophic impact of their deployment, especially from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint, and reject heightening a climate of fear, mistrust and hostility fomented by nuclear doctrines.”

The Administration has plans to expand the U.S. nuclear arsenal, developing new sea-based low-yield nuclear options. Over the next decade, the Congressional Budget Office projects the U.S. will spend \$500 billion to maintain and replace its nuclear arsenal (a 23% increase over the 2016 projected cost of the nuclear program). Over 30 years, the cost could top \$1.5 trillion. The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act authorizes the U.S. government to spend almost \$750 billion on military programs and activities (a 15% increase over the \$648.8 billion budgeted for FY 2018). Comparing defense spending, the U.S. spends more than the combined total of the next seven countries (China, Saudi Arabia, India, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Germany). Within the U.S. federal budget, military spending is the second largest category following social security.

At a time when America's military budget is set to grow, Pope Francis and previous popes have decried the amount of money spent on arms. Again, in Nagasaki on November 24, 2019, Pope Francis said, “The arms race wastes precious resources that could be better used to benefit the integral development of peoples and to protect the natural environment. In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons, are an affront crying out to heaven.” Yet the United States is expected to spend more on its military in 2020 than at any point since World War II, except for a handful of years at the height of the Iraq war.

In the coming year, the Church will heighten engagement on policy issues around nuclear disarmament as this issue remains a critical concern for the promotion of a sustainable peace. At the same time, in response to rising militarism and increased military spending, the Church will seek to prioritize the common good and advocate for dialogue, rather than reliance on military means, to resolve conflicts.

### **USCCB POLICY**

The United States has a responsibility to work to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament (USCCB: Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 69). The Committee on International Justice and Peace has called for the support and passage of the bi-partisan bills H.R. 2529 and S. 2394 that represent a patient and persistent step in the direction of reducing the nuclear threat. These bills articulate a “sense of Congress” supporting extension of the New START Treaty unless Russia is in material breach of the Treaty or the Treaty is replaced with a more robust one with equal or greater constraints, transparency, and verification measures. The bills also outline a number of prudent reporting and certification requirements that will contribute to informed national dialogue and appropriate Congressional oversight.

Resources: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/nuclear-weapons/index.cfm>.  
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