

Special Order Hour on Nuclear Weapons Threat Remarks

Rep John Garamendi (CA-08)

Thank you, Congressman McGovern, for putting this together and for the opportunity to speak on this crucial topic. Since their creation, nuclear weapons have shocked the world with their destructive potential and left us grappling with how to limit their dangers. Today, it is more important than ever that we take the steps, however difficult they may seem, to re-prioritize de-escalation and prevent a new arms race.

In 1985, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev—two Cold Warriors commanding the largest nuclear arsenals on the planet—declared that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. This profound truth has been repeated often and was reaffirmed by the leaders of all five nuclear-armed states in 2022. It should serve as both the starting point and the guiding principle in every discussion we have about nuclear weapons.

Yet today, we seem to be overlooking lessons even the most resolute Cold War strategists understood. Despite our successes in eliminating nuclear testing, shrinking stockpiles, and preventing proliferation, we now risk drifting from these hard-fought achievements. Instead of advancing cooperation, we find ourselves amid a resurgence of the same Cold War mindset that once pushed us dangerously close to the brink of nuclear annihilation.

The path before us is clear: we either continue to build on our successes in reducing the risk of nuclear war or return to the insecurity and dangers of the Cold War era.

Instead of pursuing the obvious choice, hawkish perspectives on all sides have locked the U.S., Russia, and China in a nuclear buildup—each racing to develop new long-range missiles, stealth bombers, and space-based systems, fearing the gains of the others and responding with more weapons of their own. Rather than challenging these approaches, Congress continues to authorize steps that are increasing the pace of this new nuclear arms race. This fear-driven rhetoric promotes the dangerous myth that more weapons make us safer, yet nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, without arms control agreements, every new weapon we build only fuels an unwinnable race as adversaries respond in kind.

When advocates tell us that our nuclear modernization will cost \$1.7 trillion, it is difficult to fathom just how much money that truly is. To be clear, that cost is more than what the Iraq War cost us over twenty years. And the costs just keep rising. The Sentinel program to replace the Minuteman III ICBMs has already ballooned to \$200 billion, an 81% cost overrun. For comparison, we could buy 20 aircraft carriers for the cost to modernize a few hundred unusable warheads. For a fraction of the cost, we could keep our current ICBMs, subs and air-based bombers but we continue spending blindly without any ever saying enough.

It's fascinating that from across the aisle, deficits don't seem to matter when it comes to defense. \$58 billion for the State Department is excessive, but \$200 billion for 1/3 of our nuclear triad doesn't even prompt Congress to hold a hearing. For the same \$200 billion, we could fully fund the National Institutes of Health's annual budget for 10 years, or provide universal pre-K education for every child in the U.S. for nearly 30 years.

But the cost is not just financial—though the soaring price tags of these nuclear programs are shocking in their own right—it is also the human cost, the cost to our global security, and the increased risk of catastrophic conflict.

Congress must reclaim its role in shaping a rational, responsible nuclear strategy. One that prioritizes diplomacy over escalation, de-escalation over deterrence, and arms control over arms races. The American people deserve a government that works to reduce the risks, not magnify them.

We must rebalance our focus toward arms control, recognizing that diplomatic engagement and meaningful treaties are proven tools for reducing global stockpiles and curbing the spread of nuclear weapons. These efforts demand our unwavering commitment; history has shown that reliance on nuclear arsenals as the core of our security is misguided. With nuclear stockpiles increasing worldwide, our collective call for restraint and de-escalation is more crucial than ever.

Our diplomatic efforts should match the intensity of our military programs. This requires making difficult choices, ensuring our limited resources support our true long-term security goals. Pouring billions into nuclear modernization while neglecting diplomatic initiatives is not a sustainable strategy—it's a trajectory toward greater danger and instability.

I stand before you today to say that we still have a choice. We can choose to invest in a future that prioritizes dialogue and cooperation. We can choose to modernize our thinking rather than just our weapons. And we can choose to move toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons, recognizing that it is the only true way to ensure a safer world for future generations.

The road ahead will not be easy, but it is clear. Let us reaffirm our commitment to arms control, to oversight, and to a nuclear policy based on reason and restraint, not fear and reflex. Let us continue to work together for a world free of nuclear weapons, where security is based on peace and cooperation, not the perpetual threat of annihilation.

Thank you, and I yield back the remainder of my time.