

A TWELVE-POINT PLAN TO PREVENT A NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE

proposed by the French Nuclear Disarmament Movement

“Initiatives pour le Désarmement nucléaire” (IDN)

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The risk of nuclear war has never been higher since the Cold War. This assessment comes not from a lunatic pacifist but from the former US Secretary of Defense [William Perry](#). For decades, we were nurtured by a reassuring discourse: nuclear deterrence is meant to prevent war thanks to the fear of devastating reprisals in case of aggression. Today, we can only realize that the ‘non-use’ taboo is about to disappear. The new US [Nuclear Posture Review](#) released by the Donald Trump administration is only the culmination of a trend leading to a dangerous lowering of the threshold of use of the some existing [14,000 nuclear weapons](#), pushing the world towards a cataclysm. Most nuclear powers, including France, despite mollifying statements on the purely dissuasive purpose of nuclear weapons, made deliberate technological or strategic choices which contribute to increasing the risk that they will be used: resort to less detectable cruise missiles or even hypersonic missiles; miniaturization of warheads; scenarios of nuclear escalation in case of conventional, chemical, biological, or even cyber attacks; greater vulnerability to the danger of accidental, unauthorised or terrorist use or by hacking, etc. Recent exchanges of threats between North Korea and the US, and the illusory belief that a pre-emptive strike against Pyongyang would definitively solve the issue can only lead the world to the brink of the precipice.

Many states, high-level leaders and experts are now convinced that the most effective way of preventing nuclear war consists not in accumulating and modernising nuclear weapons or making them more useable, but in eliminating them. This is why IDN presents or supports several measures which would result: in the short term in reducing the risk of nuclear war; in the medium term in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons; and in the long term in eliminating them in a multilateral, gradual, and verifiable process. This is a unique opportunity for France to play a leading role in this process and thus recover a space of initiative and influence.

I. URGENTLY REDUCE THE RISK OF USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

1) Reduce to the lowest possible level the degree of alert of nuclear forces:

About half of the some [3,000 nuclear weapons](#) deployed by the US and Russia are constantly placed in maximum alert, which would allow strikes in minutes following detection of incoming missiles. Inherent to this status is the risk of starting an accidental, erroneous or unauthorised nuclear exchange. Weapons must thus be separated from their means of delivery to give decision-makers enough time to stop the doomsday escalation.

2) Negotiate without delay and unconditionally a freeze of the North Korean nuclear and ballistic programme in exchange for a freeze of the US and South Korean military exercises:

This proposal made by [Russia and China](#) for confidence-building measures should lead to a resumption of the multilateral negotiations (Six-Party Talks), the only possible framework for an agreement on the total and effective denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The successful example of the Iran Nuclear Deal demonstrates that sanctions without any prospect of negotiation and win-win solution are bound to fail.

3) Announce the withdrawal of US tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe in exchange for the total withdrawal of Russian nuclear tactical weapons from its European territory:

Such weapons are designed to be used on European soil and in the framework of nuclear escalation between the US and Russia. Far from ensuring the security of NATO allies, they turn the European countries that host them (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey) into targets of nuclear attacks. Their **neutralization**, as a first step, and then their withdrawal would facilitate the negotiation of new reductions of US and Russian strategic arsenals.

4) Propose to all nuclear-armed states to adopt a policy of non-first use:

Apart from China and India, all nuclear powers include to some extent in their nuclear doctrines scenarios of resort to nuclear weapons to deter or as a response non-nuclear attacks (conventional, chemical, biological, cyber) perpetrated by other nuclear powers or even non-nuclear weapon states (exceptions to “**negative security assurances**”). The threshold of any use of nuclear weapons must remain high: only a policy of non-first use of nuclear weapons will significantly reduce this risk. Indeed, only a nuclear attack is likely to threaten the vital interests of a country. All the other scenarios can be deterred or responded to effectively by conventional armaments or other means of non-nuclear defence.

5) Establish a system of transparency of nuclear weapons:

Nuclear powers party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have accepted in 2010 to present regular reports on the measures they have taken to implement nuclear disarmament. But the reports released to-date are of uneven quality and contribute little to **transparency**. More information would reassure non-nuclear weapon states that their non-proliferation commitments are matched by serious efforts of nuclear disarmament.

II. STRENGTHEN THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

6) Allow entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT):

This **treaty**, adopted in 1996, is still not in force because eight states have yet to ratify it (China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, and the US), even if its provisional application already demonstrated its capacity to detect the North Korean tests. Joint ratification by the US and China, followed by an international campaign, would be an incentive for the other states to ratify and would further strengthen the norm of prohibition of nuclear testing, a fundamental element of the non-proliferation regime.

7) Negotiate without delay a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons (FMCT):

Even if most nuclear powers have introduced unilateral moratoria and stopped producing fissile material because of their substantial **stockpiles**, a new norm prohibiting production would be an effective means of preventing the development of new nuclear programmes. If this negotiation is impossible at the Conference on Disarmament (because of the Pakistani veto), the framework of the UN General Assembly can be a substitute. But a final agreement will require more than a mere prohibition of any future production: it will also need a commitment by the nuclear powers not to use their existing stocks to produce new nuclear weapons.

8) Make “further progress in diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in security policies” as called for within the NPT:

As a result of the obligations contained in Article VI of the NPT towards nuclear disarmament as part of general and complete disarmament, this **commitment** (§ 86 of the 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document) aims at making the security of states less dependent on nuclear weapons (whether they possess them or benefit from extended deterrence) and thus those weapons less attractive to states tempted by proliferation.

9) Act towards the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East:

This project has been on the agenda of the UN and the NPT since 1991. Despite several attempts in 1995 and 2010, the negotiation process towards the establishment of such a zone remains blocked by the security dilemma “Disarmament First” (Arab countries, Iran) or “Peace First” (Israel, US). An international conference that France could convene would allow a compromise for launching negotiations combining confidence- and security-building measures with disarmament measures.

III. ELIMINATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS GRADUALLY AND VERIFIABLY

10) Announce new negotiated reductions of nuclear arsenals:

The US and Russia, possessing more than 90 per cent of the world’s nuclear weapons, have the primary responsibility to negotiate as a priority new substantial and verifiable reductions in their arsenals by including all categories (strategic deployed and non-deployed, non-strategic) as well as anti-ballistic missile defence and space-based assets. Such a lowering of the mutual ceilings will allow the other nuclear powers to join the negotiation and pursue the joint study of reliable verification systems.

11) Proceed with new unilateral reductions of stockpiles:

Several nuclear powers, including France, already implemented unilateral reductions of their national stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The UK renounced the airborne component of its deterrent and only maintains the submarine-borne component. France already eliminated its land-based component and could gradually renounce its airborne component, deemed expensive, vulnerable and useless. Similarly, after having modernised its submarine-based missiles, it could without any damage further reduce their number and that of the warheads equipping them.

12) Join the mechanism offered by the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons (TPNW):

This [treaty](#), adopted by 122 states at the UN, but so far boycotted by the nuclear powers, fills an important legal gap: after biological and chemical weapons, it established a norm of prohibition of nuclear weapons, the last category of weapons of mass destruction that was not prohibited; this was motivated in particular because the use of nuclear weapons would be incompatible with international humanitarian law. This treaty provides nuclear-armed states with two options for membership: either they eliminate their nuclear weapons and join the treaty, or they become parties to it and announce to the other states parties a plan for their verifiable disarmament (possibly negotiated with the other nuclear powers).

As one can easily determine, the choice is not between two extremes – total and immediate abolition of nuclear weapons and the indefinite continuation of nuclear deterrence – but between an effective reduction of the risk of nuclear cataclysm and the maintenance of the present and future world under this danger of total annihilation.

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