

**LIMITING THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES NUCLEAR WEAPONS ARSENAL**

**NFHS POTENTIAL DEBATE TOPIC FOR 2026-2027**

**June 13, 2025**

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# **Limiting the Role of The United States Nuclear Arsenal**

## **I. Introduction**

In the 21st century, there is a litany of looming controversies that political figures, scholars, and the populace routinely debate. Few topics seem more prescient, societally, or within policy debate than the role that nuclear technology plays in our society. From nuclear energy and the disposal of nuclear waste to nuclear deterrence and the build-up of advanced nuclear technology, few issues intersect mainstream and policy debate discourse in the same way as nuclear technology. With growing threats of an arms race caused by the removal of several Cold War era nuclear treaties to the increased threat of nuclear use from adversaries like Russia and Iran, this moment in history represents an opportune time for us to ask whether our focus on nuclear deterrence makes us safer or causes more harm. In response to these changes in conditions, former president Biden released a new Nuclear Posture Review in 2022 to address and update the United States' nuclear strategy in the face of growing concerns. After winning the 2024 election, President Trump has routinely engaged in discussions surrounding our nuclear deterrent and has passed executive orders designed to increase our nuclear energy output and refinement of nuclear materials, showing that the topic is ripe for discussion. With conflicts involving nuclear (or near nuclear) armed nations breaking out in 2025, the discussion about the way that nuclear weapons contribute to deterrence is more important than ever.

Affirmatives would have the ability to reduce either the size of the United States' nuclear arsenal or the way that arsenal is deployed militarily. This would allow affirmatives to discuss issues like a nuclear no-first-use policy, hotlines for nuclear use between other nations, changing security structures regarding authorization for the use of nuclear

weapons, or just decreasing the size or types of weapons that are being commissioned for creation. The negative would have access to a trove of literature on the value of nuclear deterrence, the problems with nuclear disposal when weapons are decommissioned, as well arguments surrounding alliance ramifications of a decreased focus on the United States nuclear umbrella. In addition, there is valuable kritikal ground about coloniality, energy production, and nuclearism that will make for excellent debates on a different set of literature surrounding nuclear policy.

While high school students have not had the opportunity to discuss nuclear policy directly since the early 2000's, the collegiate debate community has recently decided to discuss nuclear weapons policy in the 2023-2024 policy debate season. While their topic might not be exactly the wording that is settled on by this paper, the proximity to this topic shows that nuclear weapons policy is timely, accessible, and fruitful for debate. The overlap between the literature base will not only increase the access to literature for all students, but the scope and range of material presented also means that the year difference between the high school and college topic would allow for substantial novel research. With the conflict in Ukraine, Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, border skirmishes between India and Pakistan, and Chinese nuclear modernization, there

Despite nuclear weapons being a constant part of policy debate for decades, high school students have not debated a topic specifically about nuclear use in the past 20 years. Given the increased focus on nuclear policy in the current political atmosphere, now seems an opportune time to rekindle the debate over the value of nuclear weapons in national security policy.

## II. Resolutions

1. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially restrict the size of and/or mission of its nuclear arsenal
2. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially restrict the size of and/or roles of its nuclear arsenal
3. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce the size of its nuclear arsenal
4. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce the role of nuclear weapons in its Nuclear Weapons Posture
5. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce either the role of its nuclear weapons in its Nuclear Weapons Posture or the size of its nuclear arsenal
6. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce the role of its nuclear deterrent
7. The United States federal government should restrict its nuclear forces including at least: adopting a no-first-use nuclear policy, disarming its nuclear forces, or substantially reducing one or more legs of its nuclear triad
8. The United States federal government should substantially change its nuclear weapons policy

All of the these topics could also use a slightly alternative actor of just “the United States” which would perhaps allow the affirmative to pursue permanent constitutional changes through processes like amendments.

Ultimately, the topic authors would suggest a unidirectional topic. However, if the community has a desire for an extraordinarily broad topic, resolution 8 would fit that need.

### III. Definitions

#### **Arsenal:**

Merriam-Webster defines “arsenal” as

(<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arsenal>)

**a:** an establishment for the manufacture or storage of arms and military equipment

The city is home to a federal *arsenal*.

**b:** a collection of weapons

A collection of common contextual uses of “arsenal” from *Sunday Times*

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/nuclear-arsenal>)

*Portable and easier to use, they could also be handed to lower-ranking commanders than those typically in control of a nuclear arsenal.*

*TIMES, SUNDAY TIMES*

*The arguments for this country retaining its nuclear arsenal are rather more subtle and sophisticated yet ultimately boil down to something similar.*

*TIMES, SUNDAY TIMES*

*It can later be turned into reactor-ready fuel or, at high levels of enrichment, be used as part of a nuclear arsenal.*

*TIMES, SUNDAY TIMES*

*Significantly, yesterday's statement made a direct link of the latest test to the country's nuclear arsenal — another escalation in brinkmanship.*

*TIMES, SUNDAY TIMES*

Also from Harper Collins (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/nuclear-arsenal>)

### COUNTABLE NOUN

An **arsenal** is a large collection of weapons and military equipment held by a country, group, or person. [...]

### **Containment:**

The Britannica Dictionary defines “containment”

(<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/containment>)

**1** : the act of preventing the spread of something

- The company's hazardous waste *containment* plan is being reviewed.
- trying to achieve cost *containment* [=trying to prevent costs from becoming too high]

**2** : actions that are intended to keep an unfriendly government from getting more power

- The government needs to adopt a *containment* strategy.

Students of History Writes

(<https://www.studentsofhistory.com/containment-the-truman-policy>)

The Truman Doctrine, also known as the policy of containment, was President Harry Truman’s foreign policy that the US would provide political, military, and economic aid to democratic countries under the threat of communist influences in order to prevent the expansion of communism.

The policy marked a step away from America's previous isolationist policies, which discouraged the US from becoming involved in foreign affairs.

The policy was introduced during a speech to Congress in 1947. President Truman urged Congress to grant financial aid to Greece and Turkey.

The Greek government needed suppressing a communist uprising. The Soviet Union was threatening Turkey over shipping through the Turkish straits.

President Truman successfully convinced Congress to provide \$400 million in aid to support the two countries.

The Marshall Plan, which provided economic assistance to democratic countries in Western Europe, was also part of Truman's policy. The US feared that desperate European countries might turn to communism if their economies did not recover.

In 1949, the US led the creation of NATO, which consisted of 12 North American and European nations, as a defensive military alliance against any Soviet efforts to expand communism.

The Truman Doctrine was not limited to Europe. American involvement in the Korean War was the first instance of the Truman policy in Asia.

### ***Counterproliferation:***

The Wilson Center defines “counterproliferation” as:

(<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/us-counterproliferation-policy>)

Alternatively, counterproliferation pertains to strategies adopted after proliferation has occurred to compel these actors to give up those unconventional military capabilities. He noted that this dichotomy parallels the traditional distinction in international relations theory between the concepts of “deterrence” and “compellence.” Nacht, citing the pioneering work of former Harvard University professor Thomas Schelling, argued that compellence (in this context, counterproliferation to reverse proliferation) is a more difficult objective to achieve than deterrence (i.e., nonproliferation to forestall its occurrence).

### ***Extended Deterrence:***

Brookings Institute writes about “extended deterrence”

(<https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-nuclear-and-extended-deterrence-considerations-and-challenges/>)

As the United States developed a post-war alliance system, the question of extended deterrence—the ability of U.S. military forces, particularly nuclear forces, to deter attack on U.S. allies and thereby reassure them—received greater attention. Extending deterrence in a credible way proved

a more complicated proposition than deterring direct attack. It was entirely credible to threaten the Soviet Union with the use of nuclear weapons in response to a Soviet attack on the United States. But how could the United States make credible the threat to use nuclear weapons against the Soviet homeland in response to a Soviet attack on U.S. allies in Europe? Or, as it was often put, how could an American president credibly persuade his Soviet counterpart that he was prepared to risk Chicago for Hamburg?

### ***Fissile Material:***

The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission defines “fissile material”

(<https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/basic-ref/glossary/fissile-material.html>)

A nuclide that is capable of undergoing fission after capturing low-energy thermal (slow) neutrons. Although sometimes used as a synonym for fissionable material, this term has acquired its more-restrictive interpretation with the limitation that the nuclide must be fissionable by *thermal neutrons*. With that interpretation, the three primary fissile materials are uranium-233, uranium-235, and plutonium-239. This definition excludes natural uranium and depleted uranium that have not been irradiated, or have only been irradiated in thermal reactors.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines “fissile material” in pretty much the same way

(<https://www.britannica.com/technology/fissile-material>)

fissile material, also called Fissionable Material, in nuclear physics, any species of atomic nucleus that can undergo the fission reaction. The principal fissile materials are uranium-235 (0.7 percent of naturally occurring uranium), plutonium-239, and uranium-233, the last two being artificially produced from the fertile materials uranium-238 and thorium-232, respectively. A fertile material, not itself capable of undergoing fission with low-energy neutrons, is one that decays into fissile material after neutron absorption within a reactor. Thorium-232 and uranium-238 are the only two naturally occurring fertile materials.

## ***Integrated Deterrence:***

Baker, Sasha. the deputy undersecretary of defense for policy. *Integrated Deterrence at Center of Upcoming National Defense Strategy*. DoD News. March 4, 2022.

(<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2954945/integrated-deterrence-at-center-of-upcoming-national-defense-strategy/>)

"As directed by the president, the NPR has examined opportunities to reduce the role of nuclear weapons while maintaining a safe, secure and effective nuclear deterrent and a credible extended deterrence," Baker said. "In order to do so we will continue to sustain and modernize U.S. nuclear capabilities. And as we develop and implement integrated deterrence, nuclear weapons will continue to serve a unique role in our defense strategy."

At the core of the National Defense Strategy will be "integrated deterrence," which Baker said is a framework for working across warfighting domains, theaters and the spectrum of conflict, in collaboration with all instruments of national power, as well as with U.S. allies and our partners.

Right now, Baker told lawmakers, potential U.S. adversaries are modernizing and expanding their own strategic capabilities

China, she said, is expanding its own nuclear forces and is investing in a nuclear triad like that of the United States — which includes land, sea and air-based delivery of nuclear weapons.

"The PRC is investing in a triad, implementing a launch-on-warning posture with advanced command and control architecture and increasing its stockpile," she said.

## ***Mission:***

Dragon 1, an enterprise and systems engineering company, defines “mission” as

(<https://www.dragon1.com/terms/mission-definition>)

Mission is the core purpose of an organization or a company. It is a summary of the aims and core values.

A mission clearly tells what you as an organization does for customers. A mission is comprehensive but also very specific to set you apart from other organizations.

Legal definition of “mission”

(<https://www.lawinsider.com › dictionary › mission-req...>)

Mission **requirements means activities that constitute the discharge of an agency's official responsibilities.** ... For purposes of this Circular, mission ...

The Free Dictionary defines “mission” as

(<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/mission>)

- n.a.** A special assignment given to a person or group:.
- b.** A combat operation assigned to a person or military unit.
- c.** An aerospace operation intended to carry out specific program objectives

### **Nonproliferation:**

The Federation of American Scientists writes

(<https://fas.org/issues/nonproliferation-counterproliferation/>)

Nonproliferation typically involves the creation and enactment of treaties, international conventions, domestic laws, regulations, and even non-binding codes of conduct. An exemplar of this approach is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970.

Britannica Dictionary defines “nonproliferation” as

(<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/nonproliferation>)

the act of stopping the production of nuclear and chemical weapons or of limiting the number of nuclear and chemical weapons in the world

- a conference to discuss nuclear *nonproliferation*
- a *nonproliferation* treaty

### ***Nuclear:***

Collins Dictionary defines “nuclear” as

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/nuclear#:~:text=Nuclear%20means%20relating%20to%20the,nuclei%20are%20split%20or%20combined.>)

#### **1. ADJECTIVE [ADJ n]**

**Nuclear** means relating to the nuclei of atoms, or to the energy released when these nuclei are split or combined.

#### **2. ADJECTIVE [ADJ n]**

**Nuclear** means relating to weapons that explode by using the energy released when the nuclei of atoms are split or combined.

### ***Nuclear Deterrent:***

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace writes:

(<https://carnegiemoscow.org/2019/03/22/nuclear-deterrence-guarantee-or-threat-to-strategic-stability-pub-78663>)

The philosophy of nuclear deterrence was born out of the symbiosis of the principle of military deterrence and the emergence of nuclear weapons. The first has thousands of years of history behind it. The latter appeared only in 1945. Intimidating an enemy with the threat of military force—to keep it from pursuing unacceptable actions or to force it into desired behavior—has long been considered a political and psychological function of armies and fleets before they enter into combat actions.

The Brookings Institution states: (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-nuclear-and-extended-deterrence-considerations-and-challenges/>)

Nuclear deterrence has been a central element of American security policy since the Cold War began. The deterrence concept is straightforward: persuade a potential adversary that the risks and costs of his proposed action far outweigh any gains that he might hope to achieve.

Vocabulary.com defines “nuclear deterrence”  
(<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/nuclear%20deterrence>)

(noun) the military doctrine that an enemy will be deterred from using nuclear weapons as long as he can be destroyed as a consequence

deterrence

the act or process of discouraging actions or preventing occurrences by instilling fear or doubt or anxiety

### ***Nuclear Stigma:***

Oxford Academic Group writes about “nuclear stigma”

(<https://academic.oup.com/isq/article-abstract/66/3/sqac055/6693951?redirectedFrom=fulltext>)

In contemporary times, scholars have increasingly turned to the research on norms to study behavior and identity transformation in international politics. This has led to understanding stigma as attached to global actors refusing to follow normatively shared expectations of social conduct. However, the field of nuclear politics has largely ignored this research in particularly identifying how noncompliant states manage their stigmatized identities, after engaging in acts of nuclear deviance against hegemonic norms. By combining and advancing the existing literature on international political sociology, constructivist approaches in international relations theory, and nuclear governance, this paper first argues that stigma should be understood as a position of relational power dynamics that recalcitrant states occupy in contesting dominant norms. Second, it conceptualizes a new category of stigma management as *stigma redaction*, whereby non-compliant nuclear states *occasionally* engage in corrective conduct to prevent their identities being permanently cemented as *rogue* by dominant powers. To contextualize both these arguments, this paper examines the empirical case of India's relationship with the United States, post India's nuclear test in 1974. In doing so, it furthers our understanding of sociological deviance in international politics through an interdisciplinary lens and contributes to the field of international security studies.

## ***Nuclear Triad:***

The Government Accountability Office writes:

(<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-210>)

The Department of Defense (DOD) plans to replace or modernize existing triad platforms including submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and bomber aircraft, as well as many of the nuclear command, control, and communication systems that facilitate control of them (see below). The Department of Energy (DOE) plans to modernize its nuclear infrastructure to life extend and produce warheads and bombs. DOD will be challenged to meet some U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) operational needs with existing triad systems, shown below, through the end of their service lives. DOD must manage shortfalls in quantities of systems that it can field and capability limitations that reduce effectiveness of these systems. For example, the Navy will have to carefully manage resources to meet USSTRATCOM's operational requirements for the *Ohio* class submarine. Further, DOE faces a long-term sustainment challenge with one of its bombs, the B83-1

The Council on Foreign Relations writes

(<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/us-nuclear-weapons-modernization>)

*Ground.* The ground-based leg of the U.S. nuclear triad, managed by the U.S. Air Force, is the largest of the three in terms of number of delivery platforms. It comprises four hundred Minuteman III intercontinental-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which were first deployed in 1970. ICBMs are missiles capable of striking targets more than 5,500 kilometers away. Each Minuteman III can deliver one warhead, though the missile originally designed to carry three to multiple targets. The United States keeps ICBMs on nearly constant alert. They are in underground silos spread out across thousands of acres of farmland in Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

*Sea.* The sea-based leg of the U.S. nuclear triad, by far the largest in terms of total deployed warheads, comprises more than two hundred Trident II submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), which can be launched from fourteen *Ohio*-class nuclear-powered submarines (SSBNs) based in Washington State, on the west coast, and Georgia, on the east coast. Twelve of the fourteen SSBNs are at sea at all times, with five each in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans always on “hard alert” in designated patrol areas, ready to launch their missiles within minutes of receiving an order from the president. Each Trident II SLBM can deliver four to five independently targetable nuclear warheads, although the missile is capable of carrying up to eight warheads.

*Air.* The air-based leg of the U.S. nuclear triad comprises two types of heavy bombers, which are based in Louisiana, Missouri, and North Dakota: forty-four B-52H Stratofortresses and sixteen stealth B-2A Spirits. The B-52H, which has been modified extensively over its fifty years of service, carries nuclear-tipped, air-launched cruise missiles. The B-2A, which became operational in 1997, can be armed with three different nuclear bombs. The Air Force used another aircraft, the B-1B Lancer, for nuclear missions until 1997, but has since modified it to carry only conventional weapons.

### ***Nuclear Umbrella:***

Collins Dictionary defines “nuclear umbrella” as

(<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/nuclear-umbrella>)

#### **NOUN**

##### *politics*

a guarantee from a country or state that possesses nuclear weapons to a country that does not that they will defend them

The US Department of Defense writes

(<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1822953/us-nuclear-umbrella-extends-to-allies-partners-defense-official-says/>)

Allies and partners around the world should and do take comfort in the fact that the U.S. has both the will and the means to use its nuclear weapons, if necessary, to protect them from aggression, the deputy undersecretary of defense for policy said here today.

In a speech at the Brookings Institution, David J. Trachtenberg said nuclear deterrence underwrites all diplomacy and dissuades adversaries from even the thought of employing nuclear weapons — including tactical nuclear weapons — as a means to coerce, he added.

“We continue to engage with allies and partners so they understand our commitment to extend deterrence to them,” he said.

Trachtenberg added that it was therefore no surprise to allies and partners that an emphasis of that commitment was reflected in the language of the fiscal year 2020 defense budget request, the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, the Nuclear Posture Review and the Missile Defense Review.

An important aspect of this strategy, he said, is keeping adversaries such as Russia and China guessing whether the U.S. would ever employ its nuclear weapons. That's why this and previous administrations have refused to countenance the promise to not use nuclear weapons as a first-strike option, Trachtenberg noted.

### **Important Steps Being Taken**

The Defense Department has taken action to assure allies and partners through demonstration of its commitment to strengthening nuclear deterrence, he said.

As examples, Trachtenberg cited the \$25 billion request in the 2020 defense budget to modernize the nuclear triad, sharing nuclear strategy and nuclear deployment capability with NATO partners and forward-deploying U.S. nuclear weapons to Europe.

He noted that the U.S. coordinates nuclear deployments with France and the United Kingdom, which also have nuclear weapons.

And finally, Trachtenberg said, throughout the Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. works closely with allies and partners who feel threatened by an increasingly belligerent China. Over the last 10 years, much more robust discussions with them have been taking place regarding U.S. commitments, he said, including extending the nuclear umbrella.

### ***Nuclear Weapon:***

Department of Homeland Security defines "nuclear weapons"

(<https://www.dhs.gov/publication/nuclear-attack-fact-sheet>)

Unlike a "dirty bomb" which disperses radioactive material using conventional explosives, a nuclear attack is the use of a device that produces a nuclear explosion. A nuclear explosion is caused by an uncontrolled chain reaction that splits atomic nuclei (fission) to produce an intense wave of heat, light, air pressure, and radiation, followed by the production and release of radioactive particles. For ground blasts, these radioactive particles are drawn up into a "mushroom cloud" with dust and debris, producing fallout that can expose people at great distances to radiation.

## The USFG defines “nuclear weapon” in 22 U.S. Code § 8008 - Definitions

**(10)**The terms “nuclear weapon” and “nuclear explosive device” mean any device designed to produce an instantaneous release of an amount of nuclear energy from special nuclear material that is greater than the amount of energy that would be released from the detonation of one pound of trinitrotoluene (TNT).

The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military defines “nuclear weapon” as

(<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100241439;jsessionid=5D6A4D63981051953E00FBFAE7319C35>)

A complete assembly (that is, implosion-type, gun type, or thermonuclear type) in its intended ultimate configuration that, upon completion of the prescribed arming, fusing, and firing sequence, is capable of producing the intended nuclear reaction and release of energy.

### ***Nuclear Weapons Posture:***

According to the Internet Archive *Wayback Machine*

([https://web.archive.org/web/20090806232307/http://www.dod.mil/execsec/adr95/npr\\_.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20090806232307/http://www.dod.mil/execsec/adr95/npr_.html))

The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) represents the nuclear analog to the Bottom-Up Review of conventional forces, undertaken in 1993 to address the significant changes in the security environment which face the United States, and the military consequences of those changes. The NPR was the first review of nuclear policy in the post-Cold War world, the first such review in 15 years, and the first review ever to include policy, doctrine, force structure, command and control, operations, supporting infrastructure, safety, security, and arms control. The decisions made in the NPR process allow DoD to put its nuclear programs on a stable footing after several years of rapid change in the international environment and in DoD's forces and programs, and at the threshold of a decade of further reductions called for by the START I and START II agreements.

Five basic themes of U.S. nuclear strategy emerged from the Nuclear Posture Review:

- First, nuclear weapons are playing a smaller role in U.S. security than at any other time in the nuclear age. This fact served as a point of departure for the rest of the review. The Bottom-Up Review and the Counterproliferation Initiative

(CPI) are designed to achieve and protect U.S. conventional superiority wherever American defense commitments require it.

- The second principal finding is that the United States requires a much smaller nuclear arsenal under present circumstances. Dramatic reductions in U.S. (and, when implemented, former Soviet) forces from Cold War levels are underway.
- Third, although the security environment has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, there is still great uncertainty about the future, particularly in the New Independent States where the process of denuclearization and reduction is underway but by no means completed. The United States must provide a hedge against this uncertainty. Therefore, the NPR stresses prudence in the face of potential risks while also identifying some new policy departures that reflect changes in the security environment.
- Fourth, the United States does not have a purely national deterrent posture; it extends the deterrent protection of its nuclear arsenal to its allies. A very progressive aspect of U.S. nuclear posture is that it is, in part, an international nuclear posture. The NPR strongly supports continued commitment to NATO and Pacific allies.
- Finally, the United States will continue to set the highest international standards of stewardship for nuclear safety and security, command and control, use control, and civilian control.

### ***Restrict:***

Legal definition of “restrict”: (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/restriction>)

A restriction is any limitation on activity, by statute, regulation, contract provision, or in a conveyance.

Dictionary.com defines restriction

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/restrict>)

*verb (used with object)* to confine or keep within limits, as of space, action, choice, intensity, or quantity

**Role:**

Dictionary.com defines “role”

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/role>)

Noun. proper or customary function:

*the role of religion in society.*

the function assumed by a person or thing in a given action or process:

*Schools offer few practical tools to help students explore their role in shaping the future.*

From Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

(<https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/role>)

the way in which someone or something is involved in an activity or situation, and how much influence they have on it

**Stockpile:**

Macmillan Dictionary defines “stockpile” as

([https://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/stockpile\\_2](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/stockpile_2))

to collect large amounts of things that may be needed

The US Department of Energy writes

(<https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/maintaining-stockpile>)

One of NNSA’s core missions is to ensure the United States maintains a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear stockpile through the application of unparalleled science, technology, engineering, and manufacturing. The Office of Defense Programs carries out NNSA’s mission to maintain and modernize the nuclear stockpile through the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Program. Details about nuclear weapons, deterrence, and NNSA’s management of the stockpile can

be found in the Nuclear Matters Handbook and the current Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan.

***Tactical:***

Dictionary.com defines “tactical”

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/tactical>)

*adjective*

1. of or relating to tactics, especially the placement of military or naval forces in battle or at the front line of a battle.
2. characterized by skillful tactics or adroit maneuvering or procedure, especially of military or naval forces:  
*tactical movements.*
3. (of a weapon) short-range, as battlefield missiles:  
*A tactical nuclear weapon would still present significant risks to battlefield troops on both sides of the conflict.*
4. Compare strategic (def. 4b).
5. of or relating to a maneuver or plan of action designed as an expedient toward gaining a desired end or temporary advantage.
6. expedient; calculated.
7. prudent; politic.

Britannica Dictionary defines “tactical”

(<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/tactical>)

of, relating to, or used for a specific plan that is created to achieve a particular goal in war, politics, etc.

- a *tactical* maneuver/procedure [=a maneuver/procedure that is done to produce a particular result]
- They gained a *tactical* advantage by joining with one of their competitors.
- He made a serious *tactical* error.

#### **IV. Related Vocabulary and Acronyms**

|      |   |                                                |
|------|---|------------------------------------------------|
| CSIS | - | Center for Strategic and International Studies |
| DoD  | - | US Department of Defense                       |
| DoE  | - | US Department of Energy                        |
| FAS  | - | Federation of American Scientists              |
| GAO  | - | Government Accountability Office               |
| IAEA | - | International Atomic Energy Agency             |
| ICBM | - | Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile            |
| MDR  | - | Missile Defense Review                         |
| NATO | - | North Atlantic Treaty Organization             |
| NDS  | - | National Defense Strategy                      |
| NNSA | - | National Nuclear Security Administration       |
| NPR  | - | Nuclear Posture Review                         |
| NPT  | - | Non-Proliferation Treaty                       |
| NRC  | - | Nuclear Regulatory Commission                  |

|              |   |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| QDR          | - | Quadrennial Defense Review                                                                                                                                              |
| RAND -       | - | The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure |
| SLBM         | - | Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile                                                                                                                                    |
| SSBN         | - | The Navy's ballistic missile submarines                                                                                                                                 |
| SSC          | - | Strategic Studies Center                                                                                                                                                |
| USAWCPress - |   | United States Army War College Press                                                                                                                                    |

## V. Timeliness

**Vergun, David.** "Officials Outline Strategy in Nuclear Posture Review." *Dod News*, Feb. 24, **2023**

Richard C. Johnson, deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear and countering weapons of mass destruction policy, and Drew Walter, deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear matters, spoke Feb. 15 at the Nuclear Deterrence Summit, in Arlington, Virginia, about NPR topics.

"This NPR recognizes that the international security environment has deteriorated, unfortunately, even since 2018," Johnson said, referring to the year when the last NPR was released.

"Obviously, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a stark reminder of nuclear risks in contemporary conflict. And in the meantime, we have the PRC nuclear modernization and expansion, presenting us with new risks and new uncertainties," he said, referring to the People's Republic of China.

These developments will mean that for the first time, the United States will face two major nuclear-armed competitors. That presents new dilemmas for U.S. strategic and regional deterrence, Johnson said, adding that North Korea and Iran also present challenges.

The U.S. Department of Defense has recently issued an unclassified National Defense Strategy for 2022. In general, it highlights the past U.S. emphasis on the Russian and Chinese threats and lesser threats from states like Iran and North Korea, and it does provide more details about future plans than most of the Quadrennial Defense Reviews and other National Defense Strategy documents the United States has issued over the last two decades. It also includes some broad sections on future *priorities* and *force planning* that provide a broad perspective on how the United States is seeking to shape and improve its military capabilities (Cordesman, 2022).

As Spulak, Jr predicted in 1997, we as a nation are facing a Russia where reforms have in fact failed, Russia is hostile towards the United States, and the security of those dangerous materials from the supposed drawdown is specious at best.

**Spulak, Robert G.** "The Case in Favor of US Nuclear Weapons." *The US Army War College: Parameters*, The US Army War College, **1997**, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1820&context=parameters.

The policies formulated under the Nuclear Posture Review were presented as a hedge against three concerns: the small but real danger that reform in Russia might fail and under a nuclear-armed government might arise, hostile to the United States; the slow pace of Russia's overall drawdown of nuclear weapons compared to that of the United States; and the security of nuclear components and materials in the nuclear nations of the former Soviet Union.

With fears about Russia's nuclear arsenal already at the forefront of our mind's in a post Cold-War Era, tensions have only elevated in recent months with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the threats of nuclear calamity as a result. Ample speculation has been documented about Russia's potential for nuclear use in the event of defeat in Ukraine. In a recent article with Business Insider, former Russia President Dimitry Medvedev, Putin's predecessor, speculated about Russia's potential to use nuclear weapons:

**Baker, Sinead.** "Russia could resort to nuclear weapons if it loses in Ukraine, says former Russian president." *Business Insider*. January 20, 2023.  
<https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-could-use-nukes-if-loses-in-ukraine-former-president-2023-1>  
Russia's former president, Dmitry Medvedev, said on Thursday that Russia could resort to using nuclear weapons if it is defeated in Ukraine.  
"The loss of a nuclear power in a conventional war can provoke the outbreak of a nuclear war. Nuclear powers do not lose major conflicts on which their fate depends," he said, according to a translation by CNN.  
Medvedev also added, pointedly: "This should be obvious to anyone. Even to a Western politician who has retained at least some trace of intelligence."

However, this conflict and the resulting effects could be *too* timely, in many ways. The Ukraine war could shift in unknown ways in the coming months. What is unlikely to change is the importance of nuclear weapons, and nuclear weapons policy, in broader U.S. security concerns. Even if we witness the fall of Russian military power, there will still be concerns about a rising China, who is rapidly modernizing their military, international arms treaties, such as the

recently defunct Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty and START, as well as proliferation. As a world leader, who has often led the way on international movements in nuclear arms agreements, United States leadership and action in this area will set a precedent for not just our security, but also that of various international actors, for years to come.

The last important consideration in the timeliness of this topic is not based on its literature and global scope, but rather a question of its timeliness in the debate community. In light of the college policy debate community's choice to debate nuclear policy in the 2023-2024 season, it is important to consider why this resolution is timely in the context of debate itself. To my knowledge, the college and high school community has never debated a topic with such an overlap in this temporal proximity. However, even in the era of online research and paperless debate, we have debated topics with a substantial overlap, including the 2022-2023 season, when both topics centered around artificial intelligence.

As many of us know, college evidence is made widely available online, and many students will be able to access this evidence during the season in order to serve as a model for their argumentation. This nearness should be considered a benefit of the resolution rather than a drawback. Students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or the size of their team, will be able to access relatively recent, high-quality literature on the question of nuclear weapons policy. Collegiate arguments will serve as a model as well as a guardrail to students who might otherwise rely on hastily researched camp files to start the season. The proximity will also create a competitive incentive at the highest levels of debate for students to complete new research that takes into account the arguments that were discussed the previous season in college. The focus on new articles will help elevate high school students' research ability and will help to encourage high quality debates that reflect the changing landscape of nuclear policy in which we live.

## VI. Scope

Whether through use or creation of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons policy affects every American. The possibility of being obliterated within minutes of the start of a war is not only unsettling but also unfair. The victims in a nuclear conflict do not choose to become involved in the conflict as a combatant but pay the ultimate price anyway. Therefore it is up to our leaders to create and carry out a very intricate, transparent, and careful policy when it comes to the management and triggering of our nation's stockpile of nuclear weapons.

For over 75 years, our government has been waging a public and private battle over nuclear weapons policy. During the Cold War, arms build-ups were the norm, where both the United States and the Soviet Union were creating arsenals with enough destructive force to annihilate the world several times over. While much focus was placed on military firepower, and whether or not it fueled more or less safety within the populace, very little foresight was given to how storage and disposal might affect communities down the road. Decades later, we are still debating the risks of disposing of nuclear waste within local and national communities. Congress has produced several proposals, and almost are all rejected due to the environmental impact on local communities.

While the catastrophic risk of nuclear weapons are discussed in nearly every debate round, it is not just the potential use of nuclear force that affects everyone in the country. From manufacture to placement to disposal, nuclear weapons and nuclear technology can create a firestorm in local communities.

## **VII. Range**

Debaters have been using nuclear war as an impact on both sides of issues for many years. This is a topic that allows for actual debate on nuclear impact and policy. Most students have a general understanding of what the aftermath of nuclear war entails. Since the 1940s every generation has had to live under the specter of being incinerated by “the bomb.” So, judges as well as debaters will have access to the ideas presented. Debating this topic will allow novice debaters to hone their skills while learning the basics of significance, inherency, harms, solvency, and topicality. There are a litany of generic disadvantages that will apply to each affirmative, from military dominance to alliance commitments. This topic will also have many opportunities to explore deterrence theories, foreign relations, philosophical issues related to the political implications of fascist and leftist policies, and additionally more creative uses of plans, counterplans, and kritiks.

In addition to the range of ground, this is also an excellent topic for debaters of all ages and skill levels. Due to the scope of nuclear weapons and their associated impacts, literature exists across multiple areas that allow for access to be easy for all. Journalists from major newspapers routinely write about changes in nuclear weapons policy and their associated domestic and international effects. Think tanks such as Brookings and Council on Foreign Relations have easily accessible briefs on the importance of nuclear weapons to the United States’ strategic deterrent. Additionally, peer reviewed articles and academic scholarship on the topic are also broad and frequently updated. Not only is the literature itself broad and accessible in scope, but so is the interest among the community. This will elevate the ability of debates to be applicable despite the circuit that debaters compete in. Military spending and the importance of modernization and defense is debated almost every year among politicians and is often

considered by the same voters who will be adjudicating debates. Modern debates rounds are proof of the importance of nuclear weapons discussions to debaters themselves, as almost every round includes a discussion of the probability of the use of nuclear force. This topic would allow that discussion to happen at all levels in a way that is more germane and will help a generation of debaters engage in these discussions more fruitfully.

To outline some more specific actions that might be discussed for both the affirmative and negative, some broad topic areas are discussed below. Some of these areas might be more or less relevant depending on the topic wording that is chosen, but all are deep enough in their literature base to support educational and fair debates.

## **Arms reductions**

**Affirmative arguments** - Common affirmative ground will include solvency advocates arguing for reductions in the size of the United States nuclear arsenal. There will be plenty of flexibility for affirmative teams within this topic area to be able read solvency advocates about full disarmament versus disarming particular weapons or percentages of the stockpile. This topic area is also ripe for debate for students of all ages and experience level. Plenty of news articles and think pieces have been written about nuclear disarmament, but so have lengthy philosophical and peer reviewed academic articles, making this case area ripe for discussion for all students.

Affirmative advantage ground can be based on a wide variety of domestic and international concerns. Affirmative teams could read advantages about the economic and military benefits of cutting large portions of the defense budget. They could also argue about domestic production of nuclear waste and the environmental impact of continued nuclearization. In the realm of international ramifications, advantages could be read about the collapse of the nuclear umbrella,

the de-escalation of tensions between rivals like China and Russia, or the positive shift that other countries might gain from developing their own autonomous defense. Ultimately, this area of literature would also allow access to students of all ages, as alliance structures are broadly written about and debated year after year.

**Negative arguments** - A wide variety of negative arguments would be available to negative teams, primarily centered around the United States' military commitment, both domestically and internationally, and the signal that disarmament would send worldwide. Students would have access to broad negative links about deterrence that are well beyond what we typically debate. This will heighten the ability of students to debate the quality of link evidence in debate, and focus more in depth on the importance of the United States' nuclear commitment. There would also be broad negative disadvantages about the response of the defense industrial base, as well as many politicians in the United States. The negative would have access to counterplans that maintain portions of the arsenal or solve the same concerns while maintaining our nuclear commitment. Alternatively, the negative could argue that a shift away from nuclear deterrence would actually cause a shift to more dangerous weapons, like precision guided smaller weapons or artificial intelligence.

### **Nuclear No First Use**

**Affirmative arguments** - The idea of nuclear no first use is a core area of literature that has been used in debate for years. Within the last 5 years, an entire Public Forum topic was centered on this topic alone. A policy of no first use is promoted by many of America's allies, and even some of its adversaries, resulting in a deep literature base that is appropriate for students of all ages.

Affirmative advantages could be focused on changes in United States military strategy in response to a shift away from preemptive nuclear options, or they could focus on some of the international ripple effects of such a policy. Affirmatives would also have the ability to claim advantages about political ramifications on executive flexibility, and the potential proliferation effects of adopting a no first use posture.

**Negative arguments** - the negative has a strong set of core negative arguments against any affirmative advocating for no first use. First, there is robust literature on the potential of conventional war to increase as a result of no first use. This literature is readily accessible to students of all ages, and is broadly supported by historical and theoretical examples. There are also great international disadvantages about the effect on alliances, the potential for proliferation from concerned NATO allies, or the political response to adopting a no first use stance. The negative would also have arguments about the effects of such a policy on executive flexibility, and the potential harm in limiting the president's powers of war.

### **Nuclear De-alert**

**Affirmative arguments** - Nuclear de-alert is a potential affirmative argument with a very well researched set of literature about its positive (and negative) effects. Nuclear de-alerting is a strategy to limit the speed at which nuclear weapons could be used, which has been proposed to limit the likelihood of accidental or intentional nuclear use. A robust literature base explores the possibility of accidental nuclear use, and impacts have been read for decades about this being the most likely scenario for escalation. De-alerting procedures would create additional physical

barriers that would make it more difficult to launch a nuclear weapon, which would substantially reduce the likelihood of miscalculation.

**Negative arguments** - Negative arguments could involve the importance for speed in nuclear response, or in the value of stealth and secrecy in nuclear policy and placement. A wide array of literature exists discussing the ability to first strike an adversary, which would be broadly undermined by nuclear silos that are easy to locate and hard to use, both of which are requirements of de-alerting the arsenal. Literature on the importance of nuclear speed is also ample, as many have discussed the need to preemptively strike military foes. Any action to de-alert our arsenal would undermine our ability to project power, which creates a balanced debate for the affirmative and negative.

### **Executive Flexibility**

**Affirmative arguments** - Another area of diverse topic literature would be centered around constraining the president's ability to use nuclear weapons. This area of debate has been explored as a section of numerous topics in college and high school policy debate. The affirmative case could take number of actions that would constrain the executive's ability to use nuclear weapons without external checks. This area of literature is interesting and allows for a completely different section of the topic controversy to be explored by students. Students would have the opportunity to learn about constitutional powers granted to different branches of government, which would open up areas of research that would keep the topic fresh and broad enough for a year of debate.

Affirmative advantage areas could focus both on nuclear policy and on the power of individual branches of government. Excellent articles exist both in academia and in public media about reducing the likelihood for nuclear miscalculation by constraining how quickly an individual could use nuclear weapons. Literature exists on the rationality of international actors, and the importance of creating checks on their unilateral action. Additionally, affirmatives would have the ability to be flexible with their advantages, as either the court or congress could function as a means of constraining executive power.

**Negative arguments** - In terms of core negative ground, there is a wide array of arguments and literature bases that the negative could access. Many articles support the increase in executive powers, particularly in the realm of being able to quickly respond to international threats.

Articles discussing the importance of responding quickly to an adversary's nuclear threats are an easy read for students of all ages. Additionally, negative disadvantages would exist surrounding the political ramifications and the legal legitimacy of actions that would broadly constrain the president. Counterplans would exist to collapse different executive powers outside of war powers, or could exist to constrain the president with another branch of the government. In addition to disadvantages and counterplans, the negative will have access to wide range of criticisms about attempts to perfect the administrative state.

## **Nuclear Umbrella**

**Affirmative arguments** - This is a very broad area of affirmative actions that could be topical, and would allow the affirmative almost limitless flexibility for advantages and research. The United States has formal and informal nuclear defense pacts with numerous countries, any of

which could be altered as a way of decreasing US nuclear deterrence. This area of the topic would be perfect for students who are seeking a new twist on similar arguments, or who enjoy research a niche foreign alliance.

Affirmative advantages could center on individual alliance commitments or broad policies of nuclear deterrence. The United States is currently signatory to 13 different defense pacts, some formal and others informal, that imply our nuclear support for individual groups or nations. This creates a large but limited set of affirmatives with unifying neg ground. This set of literature would allow students to explore some of the important aspects of alliances, like strategic ambiguity or debates over alliance entrapment. The major flexibility of advantages will deal with removing nuclear commitments from a variety of individual nations, like South Korea, Japan, or many of our NATO allies.

**Negative arguments** - Negative arguments could focus on the value of the United States extended deterrence, and the way that has created global stability. The negative would have access to great links to disadvantages about nuclear proliferation in whatever area of the world the affirmative chose to discuss. There would also be generic disadvantages about alliance commitments and nuclear deterrence, all of which would apply to any affirmative that reduces the nuclear guarantees of the United States military.

## **VIII. Material**

In the process of researching and debating a topic on nuclear weapons policy, debaters will have the ability to explore a wide array of literature that will better students of all ages and interests. Students will have the opportunity to learn about the history of nuclear policy, arms control policy, and international discussions on the development and control of nuclear weapons. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to read about a variety of international relations theories, and will have the opportunity to discuss both their strengths and their weaknesses. There will also be ample debates on governmental policy, checks and balances, and the political ramifications of disrupting our military and alliance structure. This set of arguments will help students learn about the government and its responsibility to protect the public. There is also good literature on economics that is associated with the importance of defense spending and the defense industrial base, adding an additional layer of diversity in materials that will benefit all types of students.

Outside of a wide variety of topics to discuss, the topic literature itself is also accessible to all types of debaters, from middle school students to those reading law reviews. Articles from major newspapers, university presses, and college classroom texts all discuss the importance of nuclear weapons policy. With such an ample base of articles to research, students will be able to find articles that are both applicable to the topic and at their own level of expertise.

## **IX. Interest**

This topic literature is perfect in many ways because it allows students to access the literature that they end up accessing each year anyway, but it allows them to research it and engage with it in new and more relevant ways. There will be much better links to the proliferation advantage and the Russia DA on a topic like nuclear arms reductions than there would be on most of our recent topics. There is a litany of solvency advocates that would work for both affirmative plans and negative counterplans that can create new and interesting debates even later in the season. The topic will also be debated against the backdrop of international conflicts surrounding the development of nuclear weapons, as well as one of the largest direct confrontations between nuclear armed states in India and Pakistan.

It is a new area of topic literature, which will be excellent for coaches. We have not had a topic that is actually about nuclear weapons policy since the early 2000s, which means many coaches only have experience researching and teaching this material tangentially, instead of it being the heart of the topic. Some might argue that the 2019-2020 arms sales topic was too close to this literature base, but that is not true. That topic was specifically about Direct Commercial Sales and Foreign Military Sales, neither of which permit the exchange of nuclear material or blueprints. So even on that topic, discussions of actual nuclear policy were limited.

## **X. Balance**

The balance of literature on this topic is well documented in past debate topics, both at the high school and collegiate level. The topic wordings are designed to create reasonable departures from the status quo. In addition to specific topic terms of art, the quality of link evidence for the affirmative and negative will be sufficient to generate quality debates that are focused on more than conjunctive fallacies. Decades of debate prove that students will go to great lengths in order to access literature about nuclear war. This topic would offer them the ability to access that literature in a way that is more palatable for many local communities, and also to explore the topic with a layer of depth that is thus far untested. As we all know, debate tends toward these large scale impacts regardless of the topic area selected, but a topic like nuclear weapons would allow for novices to access those arguments in a way that is more direct and logical, while more experienced debaters can delve deeply into literature that they are already drawn toward.

Both affirmative and negative ground has been explored above in terms of specific topic arguments, but the negative will also have broad arguments to be made that will attack the affirmative harms and solvency. First, the affirmative will have highly effective circumvention arguments, and arguments about shifting military funds to other programs that would counteract the affirmative plan. Additionally, the negative would have quality generic arguments about deterrence and defense industrial effects of the affirmative, which means that there is balanced ground even against unpredictable affirmatives.

The topic would be excellent for creating depth in the discussions of war that students often gloss over in debate rounds. Students will have the opportunity to explore literature on mutually assured destruction, strategic stability, the bargaining power of war, and theories on the justice of war that are often overlooked in a stereotypical debate round. By centering a topic on

the most common impact arguments in policy debate, students will have the opportunity to engage in novel and interesting debates with a balanced set of arguments that are specific to the topic at hand.

Outside of advantage and disadvantage ground being balanced, there is also balanced kritikal ground on the topic. Literature on nuclearism is quality and would be accessible for both the affirmative and the negative, depending on the strategy deployed in the debate. There are also excellent academic articles written about the relationship between nuclear policy and indigeneity in the United States. In addition, kritiks of international relations will have tremendous literature on this topic, as many affirmatives will propose solutions to international alliance structures, or will explore the potential response of American adversaries.

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