

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2016

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to share our concern with efforts that may be underway in the closing days of your Administration to abandon commitments you personally made to the Senate during the ratification of the New START Treaty.

Last week, at a conference hosted by a disarmament advocacy group, your Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications stated that,

“Finally, it is a simple fact that the modernization plan was put together in a different budget environment with a different Congress and varied expectations about our arms control efforts going forward. Our administration has already made plain our concerns about how the modernization budget will force difficult trade-offs in the coming decades. And so the president will continue [to] review these plans, as he considers how he wants to hand the baton off to his successor. So this is something we also will be continuing to look very carefully at.”

As you will recall, you wrote in a December 20, 2010 letter that “I recognize that nuclear modernization requires investment for the long-term, in addition to this one-year budget increase. That is my commitment to the Congress—that my administration will pursue these programs and capabilities for as long as I am President.”

Prior to entry-into-force of the New START treaty, as required under Senate ratification, you certified that “I intend to (a) modernize or replace the triad of strategic nuclear delivery systems: a heavy bomber and air-launched cruise missile, an ICBM, and a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) and SLBM; and (b) maintain the United States rocket motor industrial base.”

Mr. President, there is no question that these commitments were instrumental in the Senate’s decision to provide its advice and consent to ratify the New START treaty in 2010.

Additionally, your senior military leaders have made clear the modernization commitment is central to national security. Secretary of Defense Carter has stated that “the nuclear mission is the bedrock of our security. It is what stands in the background and looms over every action this country takes on the world stage. It is the foundation for everything we do.” Your Deputy Secretary of Defense has further stated that “the choice right now is

modernizing or losing deterrent capability in the 2020s and 2030s. That's the stark choice that we face."

We are concerned Mr. Rhodes' comments may presage efforts, such as a rumored "Blue Ribbon" panel, to review the modernization program you promised to fund *for as long as you are president*, which would obviously contradict your personal promise to the Senate and military necessity. This modernization program has already been well-vetted by your Nuclear Posture Review in 2010, the U.S. Senate during the ratification of the New START treaty in 2010, and, following your signature of the Budget Control Act in 2011, your review of the nation's nuclear employment guidance in 2013, and several budget submissions. Those who oppose U.S. nuclear modernization may not accept these investments as necessary, but the nation's senior civilian and military defense leaders do.

Additionally, we are worried about any efforts to "re-evaluate" the need for the replacement to the air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) – the Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO) weapon – or the replacement intercontinental ballistic missile – the Ground-based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD). Not only did you pledge to modernize both of these programs as a pre-condition to the entry-into-force of the New START treaty, but your senior military leaders have spoken to their criticality. For example, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, USAF, stated as recently as January of this year that, "to say that those are their top priorities puts them in exactly the right place."

Mr. President, your Administration has submitted six budget requests that have done a credible – though not complete – job of fulfilling the commitment you made to the Senate during ratification of New START, even while key capabilities have slipped beyond the schedule you laid out. Senior administration officials have warned that Department of Defense and Department of Energy nuclear modernization programs are "fragile" and that lack of funding in the out-years will "undermine the Administration efforts to achieve new plutonium capabilities and replace aging infrastructure."

We are committed to working with you to remedy these shortfalls. However, we urge you to uphold your commitment to the U.S. Senate to modernize the nuclear triad as recorded in a series of carefully crafted policy documents, including the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, the 2013 Nuclear Employment Guidance, and 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review. Nothing in the security environment has gotten better since these reviews -- if anything, all changes have been for the worse.

Sincerely,



JOHN MCCAIN  
United States Senator



BOB CORKER  
United States Senator