

Binding Legislation Required to Restrict Authority of the US President to Order Nuclear Strikes against Non-nuclear-weapon States

Open Letter to US Congress by Nuclear Physicists

By [Global Research](#)

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This open letter to the US Congress signed by several prominent scientists and Nobel Laureates was first published by Global Research in February 2007

February 1, 2007

United States Congress
Washington, DC

Dear Member of Congress:

As physicists, members of the profession that brought nuclear weapons into existence, we write to urge you to pass binding legislation to restrict the authority of the President to order nuclear strikes against non-nuclear-weapon states.

Last year, the American Physical Society issued a statement of “deep concern” about the “possible use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and for pre-emptive counterproliferation purposes”. In addition, 2000 of our fellow physicists have joined in a petition opposing recent changes in US nuclear weapons policies that contemplate the use of nuclear weapons against underground facilities of non-nuclear-weapon countries and for “rapid and favorable war termination on US terms”. Some of us wrote to the President last year urging him to refrain from considering nuclear weapons use against non-nuclear adversaries.

Nuclear weapons are unique among weapons of mass destruction. Employment of nuclear weapons would kill untold number of innocent civilians in the target area, and the associated radioactive fallout could kill many thousands in other countries very far from the target. There are no sharp lines between small “tactical” nuclear weapons and large ones, nor between nuclear weapons targeting facilities and those targeting armies or cities. Crossing the nuclear threshold, even with a low-yield weapon, would erase the 60-year old taboo against the use of nuclear weapons and make their use by others more likely. If the victim is a non-nuclear-weapon state, such action would destroy, or at the very least severely undermine, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with disastrous consequences for United States and world security.

In view of the rising tensions with Iran and the potential for military confrontation, as well as the public statement by President Bush on April 18, 2006, that a nuclear strike against Iran is an option “on the table”, we believe it is essential that Congress address this issue at the earliest possible time. In the case of non-nuclear adversaries there is no extreme urgency associated with response or preemption of nuclear attack against our country or our allies. We are firmly convinced that Congress should have a say on which course of action would best serve the American people on the use of the terrible weapons our profession helped create.

A decision that would have a major impact on the course of history and could ultimately threaten the survival of civilization should not be in the sole hands of the President unless absolutely unavoidable. We urge Congress to pass binding legislation to forbid the use of nuclear weapons by the United States against countries which do not possess nuclear weapons, except with explicit prior Congressional authorization for such action.

Sincerely,

Philip Anderson, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Michael Fisher, Wolf Laureate, Physics
Jerome Friedman, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Kurt Gottfried, Chair, Union of Concerned Scientists
David Gross, Nobel Laureate, Physics
John Hall, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Jorge Hirsch, Professor of Physics
Leo Kadanoff, National Medal of Science, Physical Sciences
Wolfgang Ketterle, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Daniel Kleppner, Wolf Laureate, Physics
Walter Kohn, Nobel Laureate, Chemistry
Joel Lebowitz, Boltzmann Medalist
Anthony Leggett, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Eugen Merzbacher, President, American Physical Society, 1990
Douglas Osheroff, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Norman Ramsey, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Edwin Salpeter, Dirac Medalist
Andrew Sessler, President, American Physical Society, 1998
Jack Steinberger, Nobel Laureate, Physics
George Trilling, President, American Physical Society, 2001
Steven Weinberg, Nobel Laureate, Physics
Frank Wilczek, Nobel Laureate, Physics

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