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United States Senate

May 23, 2020

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The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 25000

Dear Mr. President,

I write to oppose in the strongest possible terms a historically reckless resumption of explosive nuclear weapons testing.

According to the Washington Post, on May 15, 2020, senior Trump administration officials discussed the possibility of ending the nearly three-decade-long U.S. nuclear weapons testing moratorium.¹ This reporting comes as your Administration has engaged in a concerted campaign to dismantle the nuclear treaty architecture that has held off nuclear conflict and prevented a new nuclear arms race. These officials are reportedly searching for ways to coerce both Russia and China into a trilateral agreement to limit nuclear arsenals despite the availability of other commonsense options to preserve and enhance the global arms control regime. Should your Administration conduct a test, the United States would join North Korea as one of only two countries known to have tested a nuclear weapon in the last two decades.²

There is simply no justification for such a dramatic shift in U.S. nuclear policy. First, it would fail to achieve the reported objective, as there is no logical connection between a resumption of testing and China's propensity to join a trilateral arms control agreement. Second, there is no apparent technical basis to take the extraordinary step of testing any warheads or bombs in the enduring U.S. nuclear stockpile. The Los Alamos, Sandia, and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, along with the United States military, must annually affirm the safety, security, and effectiveness of our nuclear weapons. Advances in computing and surveillance have further

¹ John Hudson and Paul Somme, *Trump administration discussed conducting first U.S. nuclear test in decades*, Washington Post (May 22, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/trump-administration-discussed-conducting-first-us-nuclear-test-in-decades/2020/05/22/a805c904-9c5b-11ea-b60c-3be060a4f8e1_story.html.

² Anita E. Friedt, *Building Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World*, Remarks by the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, U.S. Department of State (Aug. 29, 2016), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/rls/261327.htm>.

enhanced the ability of scientists to model nuclear phenomena without resorting to tests. In fact, former Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz noted in 2015 that “lab directors today now state that they certainly understand much more about how nuclear weapons work than during the period of nuclear testing.”³

Nonexistent benefits aside, new nuclear testing would imperil the safety of Americans and risk our national security. Residents of Nevada and Utah would be at greatest risk of direct harm. The devastating consequences of nuclear explosions for public health and for the environment have motivated 184 countries to sign, and 168 to ratify, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).⁴ A U.S. nuclear test would provide an opening for countries including China, Russia, Pakistan, India, and North Korea to resume testing — and these countries, particularly China, would disproportionately benefit from testing compared to the United States. New U.S. testing would also demonstrate disregard for UN Security Council Resolution 2310, which the United States led, and which called on all states to maintain their moratoria on nuclear weapon tests or any other nuclear explosions.⁵ Lifting our testing moratorium would severely harm our reputation on the world stage, undermine our leadership, and make it difficult to hold states such as Iran and North Korea accountable for violations of Security Council resolutions.

Rather than pursuing this woefully misguided attempt to reach a trilateral agreement, I urge you to extend the New START nuclear arms control treaty for five years — thereby limiting the only new Russian strategic weapons that are likely to be deployed within that period — while taking prudent steps to bring China into the global arms control regime. If your Administration’s threat to resume testing is driven instead by unsubstantiated assertions regarding Russian and Chinese low-yield nuclear tests, I urge you to lead a diplomatic effort to bring the CTBT into force. That would allow for the intrusive, short-notice, and on-site inspections that are the most effective way to enforce compliance with the zero-yield standard.⁶

A reversal of the U.S. moratorium on testing is wholly unnecessary. It would endanger Americans while emboldening our adversaries and runs counter to generations of bipartisan U.S. global nonproliferation leadership. Moreover, it has little chance of success at achieving new arms control agreements compared to superior alternatives. I am therefore appalled by reports that your Administration could resume nuclear weapons testing. I urge you to avoid such an imprudent action.

³ Ernest Moniz, *Opening Remarks at the NNSA Stockpile Stewardship Program 20th Anniversary Event -- As Delivered*, Remarks by the U.S. Secretary of Energy (Oct. 22, 2015), <https://www.energy.gov/articles/opening-remarks-nnsa-stockpile-stewardship-program-20th-anniversary-event-delivered>.

⁴ Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, Status of Signature and Ratification, <https://www.ctbto.org/the-treaty/status-of-signature-and-ratification/>.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2310* (Sep. 23, 2016), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/09/262343.htm>.

⁶ CTBTO Group of Eminent Persons, *CTBTO GEM Statement on Alleged Low-Yield Nuclear Tests* (Jun. 26, 2019), <https://www.ctbto.org/press-centre/press-releases/2019/ctbto-gem-statement-on-alleged-low-yield-nuclear-tests/>.

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
May 23, 2020
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "E" and "M".

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator