

On nuclear first strike, White is wrong

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Hugh White's [views](#)^[1] on the dangers of the United States moving to a 'No First Use' nuclear posture are not just inherently unpersuasive, for reasons crisply spelt out by Ramesh Thakur, for instance, in recent pieces in [The Strategist](#)^[2] and [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#)^[3]. They are also most decidedly **not** shared by a large group of former prime ministers, foreign ministers, key diplomats and other senior figures from around the region, including Japan and South Korea, who recently signed [a statement on this issue](#)^[4] as members of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.



Hugh White is a very fine strategic analyst and I agree with many of his views. But he has long been far too insouciant, in my judgement, about the enormous risks in the contemporary world associated with the possession and potential use, deliberately or inadvertently, of nuclear weapons by anyone — even to the extent of him being able to contemplate with equanimity [a nuclear-armed Japan](#)^[5] as part of his vision for a more evenly balanced new '[concert of powers](#)^[6]' in East Asia. The existential scale of those risks have been acknowledged by no less a group of hard-headed Cold War realists than Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Bill Perry and Sam Nunn in their [famous series of Wall Street Journal articles](#)^[7] since 2007. Their voices should be heeded. A policy of 'No First Use' can only be a first step on what will necessarily be a very long journey to a nuclear weapons free world, but US President Barack Obama's willingness to take it is hugely welcome.

The [statement](#)^[8] of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament is reproduced here in full.

'The Obama administration is reportedly considering how to re-energize the nuclear arms control agenda in the endgame of his presidency. One significant initiative that has been flagged is a No First Use policy whereby the US would commit itself not to be the first to use

nuclear weapons in any circumstances.

We would welcome this significant change in the longstanding US nuclear strategy as President Obama's vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world has made little visible progress.

President Obama entered office with a strong commitment to the nuclear policy agenda. His first major foreign policy speech in Prague in 2009 articulated a powerful vision of a world free of the threat of nuclear weapons. His achievements as president include the New START treaty with Russia, four Nuclear Security Summits, the deal to ensure that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful, and a historic visit to Hiroshima in May.

The bold agenda has stalled.

A No First Use policy would have both symbolic value and significant practical implications. Its potential benefits greatly exceed possible downsides. It would encourage a shift away from high risk doctrines and weapons deployments. A No First Use policy would avoid the need for forward deployment, launch-on-warning postures, and pre-delegation of authority to battlefield commanders, significantly dampening the prospects of accidental and unauthorized use. It would also speak to the world's growing humanitarian concerns on nuclear weapons.

If, following the US example, No First Use were adopted by all nuclear armed states, the policy could become the centrepiece of a global nuclear restraint regime, strengthen strategic stability, mute crisis instability, solidify the boundary between nuclear and conventional weapons, and further entrench the norm against the use of nuclear weapons.

President Obama has rightly noted that "As the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons", the US "has a moral obligation to continue to lead the way in eliminating them". Increased confidence following a No First Use convention would reduce tensions between nuclear-armed states and contribute to a climate conducive to further progress on nuclear disarmament.

We strongly encourage a US No First Use policy and call on America's Asia-Pacific allies to support it'.

9th August 2016

Signed:

- Nobuyasu Abe, Commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, former UN Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs
- Hasmy Agam, Chairman of the Malaysian Commission of Human Rights, former Ambassador to the United Nations
- Myung-bok Bae, Editorial Writer, JoongAng Ilbo, Republic of Korea
- Jim Bolger, former Prime Minister of New Zealand
- John Carlson, former Director General of the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office
- Simon Chesterman, Dean of Law, National University of Singapore

- Yungwoo Chun, former Senior Secretary to the President of the Republic of Korea for Foreign Affairs & National Security
- Cui Liru, Senior Fellow, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations
- Jayantha Dhanapala, former UN Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs
- Gareth Evans, Chancellor, Australian National University and former Foreign Minister of Australia
- Fan Jishe, Director for Strategic Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing
- Trevor Findlay, University of Melbourne and Member of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament
- Marianne Hanson, University of Queensland
- Peter Hayes, Director, Nautilus Institute
- Pervez Hoodbhoy, Professor of Nuclear Physics and Member of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament
- Yongsoo Hwang, Director General, Korea Institute of Nuclear Nonproliferation and Control
- Jehangir Karamat, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Chief of Army Staff, Pakistan
- Yoriko Kawaguchi, former Foreign Minister of Japan
- Sung-hwan Kim, former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea
- Hong-koo Lee, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea
- Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, and former Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations
- Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary, High Commissioner to the UK, and Ambassador to the US
- C. Raja Mohan, Head Carnegie India
- Ton Nu Thi Ninh, President, Tri Viet International University and former Ambassador of Vietnam to the European Union
- Nyamosor Tuya, former Foreign Minister of Mongolia
- HMGS Palihakkara, former Foreign Secretary and former Governor of Northern Prov., Sri Lanka
- Sir Geoffrey Palmer, former Prime Minister of New Zealand
- David Pine, former New Zealand High Commissioner to Malaysia
- Kasit Piromya, former Foreign Minister of Thailand
- Surin Pitsuwan, former ASEAN Secretary-General and Foreign Minister of Thailand
- R. Rajaraman, Emeritus Professor of Theoretical Physics, Jawaharlal Nehru University
- Manpreet Sethi, Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi
- Shen Dingli, Associate Dean, Institute of International Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai
- Minsoon Song, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and President, University of North Korean Studies
- Rakesh Sood, former Special Envoy of India's Prime Minister for Nuclear Non-Proliferation
- Carlos Sorreta, Ambassador of the Philippines to Russia
- Tatsujiro Suzuki, Director, Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University
- John Tilemann, Research Director of APLN

- Shashi Tyagi, former Chief of the Indian Air Force
- Siddharth Varadarajan, Editor, The Wire (India)
- Arun Vishwanathan, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore
- Wiryono Sastrohandoyo, former Indonesian ambassador to Australia
- Hee-ryong Won, Governor, Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, Republic of Korea
- Angela Woodward, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
- Hidehiko Yuzaki, Governor of Hiroshima Prefecture

Gareth Evans is Chancellor of The Australian National University and former foreign minister of Australia.

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<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/08/31/on-nuclear-first-strike-white-is-wrong/>

[1] views:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/08/24/no-first-use-nuclear-pledge-bad-for-us-standing-in-asia/>

[2] *The Strategist*:

<http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/no-first-use-policy-reduces-risk-nuclear-war/>

[3] *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*:

<http://thebulletin.org/why-obama-should-declare-no-first-use-policy-nuclear-weapons9789>

[4] a statement on this issue:

http://www.a-ipln.org/statements/statements_view/APLN_No_First_Use_Statement_2016?ckattempt=1

[5] a nuclear-armed Japan:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/08/07/70-years-on-peace-remains-incomplete-2/>

[6] concert of powers:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/03/27/can-asia-break-free-of-great-power-dynamics/>

[7] famous series of Wall Street Journal articles:

<http://www.nuclearsecurityproject.org/publications/wall-street-journal-op-eds>

[8] statement:

http://www.a-ipln.org/statements/statements_view/APLN_No_First_Use_Statement_2016?ckattempt=1