

# Nuclear Risk Reduction: Executive Branch Policies and Congressional Approaches in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress

July 24, 2026

Following the [February 2026 expiration](#) of the [2010 New START arms control agreement](#), which reduced U.S. and Russian strategic offensive nuclear forces, some Members of the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress have held hearings and debated legislative proposals related to nuclear risk reduction. [Nuclear risk reduction](#) generally refers to information exchanges, operational constraints, or transparency measures (e.g., nuclear crisis hotlines or ballistic missile launch notifications) that are less formal than [arms control](#) and aim to reduce the risk of inadvertent or accidental nuclear war. Such cooperative or unilateral measures may aim to mitigate the risk that conventional conflict unintentionally escalates to nuclear weapons employment.

An Under Secretary of State [said](#) in February 2026 the United States would “pursue responsible pathways to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world, consistent with President Trump’s vision and our obligation under the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] ... through both bilateral and multilateral venues.” The 2023 final report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States [stated](#), “arms control and risk reduction ... contribute to the goals of U.S. nuclear strategy by shaping adversary perceptions and capabilities, decreasing uncertainty, and reducing the risk of miscalculation.”

Congress plays a role in risk reduction, which, like arms control, may be implemented pursuant to [treaties or agreements](#) negotiated by the executive branch. The Senate [considers](#) providing advice and consent to treaty ratification. Congress can exercise oversight of the executive branch’s [nonbinding or political commitments](#) that may not require Senate action. Congress authorizes and appropriates funds for, and provides oversight of, the Department of State (DOS), Department of Defense (DOD, which is “using a secondary Department of War designation,” under [Executive Order 14347](#) dated September 5, 2025), and other agencies that negotiate, implement, monitor, and verify compliance with relevant treaties and agreements.

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN12717

## Executive Branch Policies

An Assistant Secretary of State [said](#) in February 2026, “The United States proposed multilateral strategic stability talks as a means to achieving future arms control.” The second Trump Administration [has sought](#) to advance some of its nuclear risk reduction goals through the [permanent five \(P5\) process](#) that includes the United States, Russia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC or China), the United Kingdom (UK), and France. According to a May 2026 [DOS statement](#), the United States proposed starting P5 working groups and certain risk reduction measures, including P5 ballistic missile launch notification and P5 nuclear crisis communication, though these U.S. efforts “have not yet gained consensus.” In July 2026, the Secretary of State [said](#), “if you’re going to have true arms control, it has to be triparty,” involving the United States, Russia, and China.

[Russian](#) officials state they have [sought](#) “tangible improvements in [overall] U.S. policy toward Russia,” especially [following](#) what they described as a lack of Trump Administration interest in Russia’s [September 2025 proposal](#) to [extend](#) New START numerical limits. Russian officials have [reiterated](#) interest in including the UK and France in nuclear talks and [their commitment](#) to certain bilateral U.S.-Russian nuclear risk reduction measures, such as [ballistic missile launch notification](#) and [nuclear crisis communication](#).

PRC officials have [declined](#) to join nuclear talks, arguing China possesses fewer nuclear weapons than Russia and the United States. Despite past U.S.-PRC [discussions](#) on the potential stabilizing influence of regular bilateral ballistic missile launch notifications, China reportedly [gave little advance notice](#) to the United States ahead of its July 6, 2026, submarine-launched ballistic missile test. It is unclear if the United States and China have taken any steps in line with their [2024 statement](#) on “the need to maintain human control over the decision to use nuclear weapons.”

[North Korea](#) has rejected negotiations on its nuclear weapons since the most recent talks [broke down in 2019](#). Some experts [see](#) nuclear risk reduction as an [alternative](#) to full denuclearization or an interim step to [prevent](#) nuclear conflict.

The United States has sometimes facilitated risk reduction between India and Pakistan, most recently in [spring 2025](#). The neighboring countries—whose relations “remain a risk for nuclear conflict,” according to the [2026 Annual Threat Assessment](#) of the U.S. Intelligence Community—maintain a ballistic missile launch notification agreement, among other measures.

## Congressional Approaches

Several hearings on arms control and nuclear risk reduction have been held in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, including

- a Senate Foreign Relations Committee [expert hearing](#) on December 10, 2025, on “Arms Race 2.0” and a March 24, 2026, [oversight hearing](#) with DOS Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Thomas DiNanno;
- a House Committee on Foreign Affairs [oversight hearing](#) with Under Secretary DiNanno on March 25, 2026, and an April 29, 2026, [expert hearing](#) on emerging threats to U.S. space security; and
- a Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) [expert hearing](#) on February 3, 2026, on “Strategic Competition in an Unconstrained, post-New START Treaty Environment.”

Some Members have introduced legislative provisions related to nuclear risk reduction, including

- H.Rept. 119-698, accompanying a House Armed Services Committee-reported National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2027 (NDAA; H.R. 8800), includes a [provision](#) for a DOD report to include a description of DOD “activities in support of arms control and risk reduction objectives, including recommendations, if any, provided by the Department on key attributes of a future multi-lateral arms control agreement.”
- S.Rept. 119-127, accompanying a SASC-reported FY2027 NDAA (S. 4784), includes a [provision](#) directing DOD officials to brief congressional defense committees on “existing and potential nuclear and space risk reduction measures” involving the United States, Russia, and China.
- H.R. 8086 would codify the DOS National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Center (NNRRC) that is to report to the Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security. The NNRRC was first [proposed](#) by some Members in 1982 and [established](#) by the Reagan Administration in 1987.
- S.Res. 61 and H.Res. 100 call for U.S. dialogue with Russia and China on nuclear risk reduction and arms control.

Members may continue to conduct oversight through hearings and legislation. Members may consider requesting briefings from Administration officials on U.S. nuclear risk reduction engagement with adversaries through the foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence committees and through the [Senate National Security Working Group](#), which “may authorize [M]embers to act as official observers on the United States delegation” to relevant negotiations.

## Author Information

Anya L. Fink  
Analyst in U.S. Defense Policy

Mary Beth D. Nikitin  
Specialist in Nonproliferation

---

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS’s institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.