



October 11, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The members of the Nuclear Crisis Group (NCG) believe the greatest risk of nuclear weapons use today stems from the possible escalation of current conflicts in regions of tension. Primary among these are the nuclear flashpoints of the Korean peninsula, Europe, South Asia, and East Asia more broadly. The NCG — consisting of 21 former military and security officials and national security experts from almost a dozen countries — convened our first meeting in May 2017 to identify these nuclear flashpoints and make concrete recommendations that could prevent existing conflicts from escalating to the use of nuclear weapons. We made clear in our June report “that the risks of nuclear weapons use — intentional or otherwise — are unacceptably and unnecessarily high and require urgent leadership and global action.”

When we met this year, we discussed that Iran and the Middle East did not qualify as a nuclear flashpoint because of the full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, and the European Union. This groundbreaking diplomatic agreement provided the means for Iran to demonstrate that its nuclear activities were permanently and verifiably peaceful, and for Iran to regain its status as a compliant member of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It likewise provided the other parties with verifiable confidence that Iran was not close to being able to produce nuclear materials for nuclear weapons and would avoid specific activities directly related to nuclear weapons development.

The JCPOA, which helped avoid the development of a nuclear-tinged conflict, is now at risk. We are deeply concerned by recent reports that you will declare Iran is not in compliance with the agreement. No evidence has been produced by either the International Atomic Energy Agency or U.S. intelligence agencies showing Iran in active or significant violation of the JCPOA. Decertifying Iranian compliance without cause risks the unraveling of the JCPOA and could leave Iran able to advance its nuclear capabilities without restriction or strict verification. It would also isolate the United States at the very moment its leadership is most needed to help avoid nuclear dangers in the regions we addressed in our report.

All parties should remain in compliance with the JCPOA. Members of the Nuclear Crisis Group would criticize any decision by Iran to materially violate the terms of this agreement. We believe there is great risk in undermining, threatening, or ending an agreement that can verifiably constrain Iran’s nuclear capabilities for decades, and one in which Iran commits permanently never to build or acquire a nuclear weapon. In addition, U.S. abrogation of an agreement that is being honored by all parties would undermine the credibility of the United States in all manner of negotiations, making it unlikely — to take just one dangerous example — the standoff with North Korea will be resolved by peaceful means.

If the President of the United States, the United States Government, or the International Atomic Energy Agency has conclusive evidence Iran is in violation of its obligations, then that must be produced and assessed by Congress, the American people and the other members of the JCPOA. If Iran, however, is in compliance with its central obligations, we urge the Administration to keep the word of the American government and people and implement the agreement as negotiated. We would welcome constructive steps to both address Iran's other regional activities that risk conflict and instability, just as we would a sincere effort to negotiate a follow-on agreement to the JCPOA that would further extend limits on Iran's nuclear activities to build even greater confidence in their non-military nature.

Sincerely,

**Ambassador Richard Burt**, Fmr. U.S. Chief Negotiator, Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)

**General (ret.) James E. Cartwright**, Harold Brown Chair in Defense Policy Studies, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Fmr. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

**Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering**, Fmr. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; Fmr. Ambassador of the United States to the United Nations, Russia, India, Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria, and Jordan

**The Honorable Christine E. Wormuth**, Director, Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience, Atlantic Council; Fmr. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

**The Honorable Thomas M. Countryman**, Fmr. Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation

**Dr. Bruce G. Blair**, Co-Founder, Global Zero; Research Scholar, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University

**Mr. Matthew Brown**, Co-Founder, Global Zero

**Mr. Jon Wolfsthal**, Director, Nuclear Crisis Group; Senior Advisor, Global Zero; Fmr. Special Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor for Arms Control, National Security Council