

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: **Interrupting a Nuclear Weapons Heyday**

### **The Takeaway:**

- Defense authorization and appropriations negotiations for FY2023 are fully underway, and Republicans and some Pentagon officials are scheming to fund the development and production of the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile—Nuclear (SLCM-N) and B83 megaton bomb.
- Authorizing new nuclear weapons production in the middle of an economic crisis and tense conflict with other nuclear-armed powers undermines people's security rather than builds it, and also flies in the face of the United States' stated nonproliferation commitments.
- Refusing to fund new nukes should be just the start — for the well-being of humankind, and the planet, it's imperative that policymakers work to abolish nuclear weapons, period, and focus on funding non-military initiatives that actually keep us safe.

## **Holding the Line on Nukes: Opposing Funding for SLCM-N and B83**

Earlier this week, Congress kicked off its annual markups of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), this time for the 2023 fiscal year. With the bill seeking to authorize an astounding \$813 billion, (\$847 billion, if the Senate gets its way) for Pentagon spending, it is full of numerous opportunities for waste, approving initiatives that the Pentagon doesn't need to pursue.

This year, Win Without War is advocating against funding two weapons in particular: a nuclear sea-launched cruise missile and the B83 megaton bomb. At a time when many people in the United States are feeling the costs of war from the gas pump to the grocery store, and watching the U.S. government clash with other nuclear powers like Russia and China, expanding the nuclear arsenal is the last thing people need. Making sure SLCM-N remains undeveloped and fully retiring the B83 bomb are some of just a few ways we can challenge Congress to address real security threats and limit potential provocations for future nuclear war.

### **Just What Are These Weapons?**

SLCM-N is a Trump-era initiative to arm Navy submarines and possibly surface ships with "low-yield" nuclear missiles. Prior to the Trump administration's decision to fund research and development of the weapon, the Obama administration [retired](#) it, and George H.W. Bush

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removed its predecessor off Navy ships as part of a nuclear de-escalation effort at the end of the Cold War. Considered unnecessary by both Republican and Democratic administrations, and with an estimated price tag of \$10 billion, the weapon serves as yet another example of Trump's reckless defense policy and commitment to enriching weapons contractors.

With [80 times](#) more power than the bomb dropped in Hiroshima, the B83 is a different type of reckless, but lethal and devastating all the same. Praised for its ability to destroy underground bunkers — meaning, that should the U.S. seek to carry out a nuclear strike, the Pentagon can proudly claim there's nowhere to hide — this weapon has been kept around by the Pentagon for 40 years. This old, Cold War-era nuke's life extension would cost \$100 million just to start, and would eventually be as expensive to finish as building a completely new nuclear weapon.

So who's interested in developing these weapons systems? President Biden [doesn't want](#) them. Several congressional Democratic leaders, like Chairman Adam Smith of the House Armed Services Committee, [don't want](#) them. The Navy has said it [doesn't need or want](#) SLCM. But Republicans and certain members of the military brass have spent the past several months [campaigning](#) for these weapons to be authorized in FY2023 defense and appropriations bills, already succeeding in getting the Senate Armed Services committee to authorize [\\$25 million](#) for SLCM-N research and delaying B83 retirement to until the government can produce yet another study on its effectiveness as a bunker buster. The House Armed Services committee, however, still has the chance to totally take these weapons off the books, and committee members are hearing from Win Without War and leading nuclear non-proliferation groups regularly.

These weapons champions aren't the only ones who have been campaigning. We've spent the last few months meeting with elected officials, working with partners, and educating our base on the need to end these weapons, gearing up for the legislative fights that are picking up steam right about now. So let's dive into just how costly and dangerous these nukes are.

## Nightmare on Doomsday Street

To put it bluntly — operationalizing SLCM-N is a tactical nightmare. On a radar screen, nuclear and conventional missiles launched from the same platforms (in this case, submarines and ships) are [indistinguishable](#) from one another. With plenty of U.S. submarines already purposed for other conventional missions, these ambiguities will make it difficult for other countries to tell if a cruise missile launched by the United States is conventional or nuclear, forcing them into high pressure decisions about carrying out a nuclear response.

Aside from its potential to confuse threat levels on the nuclear landscape (small detail, we know), the logistics of getting its production and use up and running also raise a host of other issues. The missiles themselves are not necessarily housed in the same states as the submarines, which prompts questions about how they'll be moved and which U.S. states will be responsible for now [storing](#) these nuclear weapons. Servicemembers currently don't have the

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[training](#) needed to operate these weapons and would need to receive some. These are just a few of the issues that will arise should the U.S. pursue this form of nuclear proliferation.

The case against the B83 is all the simpler. Using a 1+ megaton bomb as a “bunker buster” could kill up to 3 million people, [per one simulation](#). It’s not tactical. It’s intolerable, and unacceptable.

## Trying to Avoid Global Nuclear War

Another unavoidable consequence of increased nuclear weapons production is that it’s not done in a vacuum. The Biden administration has [attempted](#) to avoid direct military conflict with Russia during its invasion of Ukraine in an effort to avoid an escalation to nuclear warfare, even in the face of Putin making vague but concerning [threats](#) of unforeseen violence to come should other countries interrupt his colonial conquest. Additionally, in the last several years, U.S. military officials and policymakers have justified demands for increased weapons production and Pentagon spending in response to China’s expansion of its weapons stockpile, and concerns about whether the Chinese government intends to forcefully infringe on Taiwanese sovereignty in the near future. As tensions increase on multiple sides, what sort of message does it send to these countries if the United States increases its stockpile with weapons like SLCM-N and the B83?

Building out the U.S. nuclear arsenal can spur other countries to expand theirs as well. In other words, new weapons production can inspire greater threats to people’s security rather than act as a deterrence from it.

Weapons like these, and perhaps all nuclear weapons, threaten each and every person on Earth by raising the threshold for what’s considered collateral damage in pursuit of military domination. Bombs like B83 are treated as reasonable and successful tools for their ability to obliterate human life miles beneath the ground, on our very much *shared, and already dying, planet*. SLCM-N muddies people’s ability to perceive what is a threat or not, putting service members who don’t even operate these weapons at increased risk of conflict, and the rest of us as well. Any cost is considered worth it to prove that the U.S. government has no limits in its capacity to cause irreparable and widespread harm to others, in a way that will also undeniably harm the people in its own country at the same time.

Each of these weapons’ capacities to cause mass human and environmental destruction renders them impermissible. It falls on policymakers to scrutinize demands to fund these weapons of mass destruction and the great costs they come with.

## Opportunity Costs

For all the money we throw at nukes, there’s a host of critical needs that go unmet — greater pandemic response, affordable healthcare, climate action, housing assistance in response to

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rent increases, adequate public transportation in the face of rising gas prices, and the list goes on.

In a country where we're currently reliving the time when white supremacists tried to overthrow a presidential election, and fighting back against ongoing attempts to erase queer rights and kill black people, all amongst a backdrop of daily gun violence, it's crystal clear that nuclear weapons, of all things, are not what will keep us safe.

There was a time when people assumed that nuclear war was inevitable. They prepared their bunkers and ran school evacuation drills and held their breaths to see if the handful of world leaders who held the power to commit mass murder would jump over that cliff.

That's not security. And living with that level of fear isn't sustainable. That's why a countless number of people have organized and participated in civil disobedience to push their leaders to engage in diplomacy, decrease nuclear stockpiles, make public promises against weapons use, and whatever else it takes to avoid such a final outcome. People have proven that nuclear war is not a given, and we need policymakers to continue to ensure that stays the case.

## **What We Need Instead**

If we're to really build the security of people in the United States and abroad, rather than simply giving some Pentagon officials whatever they want, we need members of Congress to encourage nuclear nonproliferation and diplomacy whenever they get the chance. They should [support](#) bills calling for a no first-use policy, declaring that the United States will never be the first party to use nuclear weapons, and other legislation that ends the president's sole authority to launch those types of weapons. Additionally, while the United States remains in tense conflict with Russia at the moment, pursuing nuclear nonproliferation treaties with other nuclear powers, like the United States' and Russia's New START treaty, are proven ways to help de-escalate tensions and avoid going down the path of no return. And given how much these weapons come with unacceptable costs, policymakers should also push for the U.S. to decrease and abolish its nuclear weapons stockpile overall.

It's crucial that any and all efforts to further endanger the world with nuclear weapons — from SLCM-N and B83 to the vast array of other weapons the U.S. holds — are met with fierce pushback. We call on congressional members who have these upcoming opportunities to defeat nuclear proliferation efforts with NDAA and Appropriations legislation to do so.

## BURIED LEDES

ICYMI, Biden [will travel](#) to Saudi Arabia in July, likely meeting with Mohammed bin Salman. **The reward for waging war in Yemen, murdering Jamal Khashoggi, and violently suppressing human rights should not be a photo-op with POTUS.** [Read our statement here.](#)

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If DC politicians need a reminder of why being buddy-buddy with MbS is not a good idea, **they can head down to the newly-minted [Jamal Khashoggi Way](#), smack in front of the Saudi Embassy**. Rest in Peace, Jamal.

**[The war industry increases inequality in the U.S.](#)** — that's why the Poor People's Campaign has made it one of their key demands to end warmongering and rein in Pentagon spending. Join their powerful [anti-poverty march](#) this Saturday in DC!

If you need another reason to show support for cutting the war budget — **a Senate committee just voted to increase the Pentagon budget by \$45 billion, bringing the total to a whopping \$847 BILLION**. It's unconscionable when so many are [struggling](#) to feed their families.

SCOTUS [ruled this week](#) that immigrants detained in the U.S. can be held indefinitely, **with no right to a bond hearing or counsel**. With [unsafe conditions and abuse](#) in many ICE detention centers, allowing indefinite detention is especially egregious and troubling.

It's been [10 years since](#) the creation of the DACA program. **While a vital program protecting the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of young people, DACA is still only a temporary solution**. It's time for permanent protections leading to citizenship for all.

**The Biden administration is considering [selling Gray Eagle drones to Ukraine](#)**, which can be operated from outside Ukraine and could hit targets inside Russia. This could be escalatory by [creating ambiguity](#) between the actions of NATO countries and Ukrainian troops.

And finally, if you've ever wondered [what pets do when we're not around](#)...