Fear of a nuclear attack rose last year after President Donald Trump responded to North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un’s threats against the United States by saying, “They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.” (Toru Hanai/Reuters)

“A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”
— President Ronald Reagan in his 1984 State of the Union address

U.S. presidents have always understood the calamitous power of nuclear weapons. They held the fate of our planet and human civilization in their hands with sole authority to launch a nuclear warhead that could not be recalled.

President should not have sole authority to launch nuclear weapon »

Under President Donald Trump, the danger of putting planetary fate of the world in the hands of one person has never been clearer. He refuses to listen to, or abide by, the advice of our career military and diplomatic experts. His ill-advised and impetuous withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria is only the most recent example. Since taking office, President Trump has abandoned the multilateral agreement that constrained Iran’s nuclear program. He also announced plans to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which for more than 30 years banned intermediate range missiles and has contributed to stability in Europe.

According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists: “The INF treaty’s potential death foreshadows a new competition to deploy weapons long banned. Unfortunately, while treaties are being eliminated, there is no process in place that will create a new regime of negotiated constraints on nuclear behavior. For the first time since the 1980s, it appears the world is headed into an unregulated nuclear environment — an outcome that could reproduce the intense arms racing that was the hallmark of the early, unregulated decades of the nuclear age.”

President Trump has implied a willingness to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear nations and his administration’s Nuclear Posture Review expands an already dangerous nuclear arms buildup.

Trump, Afghanistan and nuclear weapons »

As leaders of the Greater Washington area, home to the seat of our federal government and headquarters of its military — we are particularly at risk. We are living in the crosshairs of
America’s enemies, both hostile governments and terrorists.

These weapons take a fiscal toll as well. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the United States is projected to spend roughly a half-trillion dollars on its arsenal over the next decade. Breaking down that huge number shows that Montgomery County residents paid $308 per person, Baltimoreans $171 and D.C. residents $306 in 2019 to support this arsenal. All Maryland taxpayers together will pay approximately $1.42 billion this year; money that would have been better spent on fixing our failing infrastructure, expanding public transit to better connect our area, supporting public education, housing and healthcare.

The Montgomery County Council has joined Baltimore and Washington, D.C. with its own “Back From the Brink” resolution to support the U.N. Nuclear Ban Treaty, alongside the U.S. Conference of Mayors and 40 municipalities and state legislatures from California to Maine calling on the Trump Administration and Congress to exercise global leadership in preventing nuclear war by:

- Renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first;
- Ending the President’s sole, unchecked authority to launch a nuclear attack;
- Taking U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert;
- Canceling the the $1.7 trillion dollar plan to replace the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons;
- Supporting the U.S. entry into the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; and
- Requiring the U.S. to pursue a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

The U.N. treaty is two-thirds of the way toward the 50 ratifying nations needed to make it operational, whereupon nuclear weapons will be prohibited, stigmatized and eventually eliminated.

U.S. nuclear policy is undemocratic »

Until that time, we have added our voice to the growing call for changes to take us back from the brink of nuclear annihilation. While past presidents have worked to reduce the risks, President Trump has increased them. We can no longer trust our impetuous president to do what’s in the nation’s, and the world’s, best interest. That’s why it’s imperative that as elected officials and individuals, we speak out.

Councilman Bill Henry (bill.henry@baltimorecity.gov) has represented the 4th district of Baltimore City since 2007. He introduced the “Back from the Brink” resolution which passed the full Baltimore City Council in August of 2018.

Councilmember Tom Hucker (tom.hucker@montgomerycountymd.gov) has represented the 5th district of Montgomery County since 2014. He introduced the “Back from the Brink” resolution which passed the full Montgomery County Council in December of 2019.

Councilmember at-large David Grosso (dgrosso@dccouncil.us) was elected to the D.C. Council in November 2012 to represent residents in all eight wards. He introduced a “Back from the Brink” resolution in January 2019 that was passed unanimously by the DC Council in March of 2019.