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U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy in Need of Repair

Winthrop University

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U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy in Need of Repair

Quick Facts

- Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, spoke Oct. 2 in Owens Hall.
- UCS, a science-based nonprofit organization, is headquartered in Cambridge, Mass.

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Two decades after the end of the Cold War, the United States finds its policy-making process on matters of war, peace and security is terribly broken, according to Kevin Knobloch, president of the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#).

"It seems the last question being asked is: What will make us truly safer?" he said during an Oct. 2 speech at [Owens Hall](#) on the Winthrop University campus. "In the presidential campaign, we have a good example. Candidates from both parties have used the term 'all options on the table' when it comes to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. That term is code for 'I will consider using nuclear weapons preemptively.' It's thoughtless, reckless – even dangerous rhetoric."

Importantly, Knobloch said, what discussion there is seems to be about what other countries should or should not be doing, with virtually no discussion about America's own policies.

He said the U.S. has about 5,000 deployed nuclear weapons and another 5,000 in storage, ready to be deployed if necessary. The Russians reportedly have about 15,000 total warheads, though nearly 10,000 of those are in storage, Knobloch said.

The U.S. and the Russians each have a range of systems to deliver those warheads, including long-range land-based missiles, submarine-launched missiles and aircraft outfitted to carry missiles and bombs. Some of these missiles carry up multiple nuclear warheads.

"Just one of those missiles carries the destructive force to alter civilization in unthinkable ways. We are talking about millions of deaths and the wholesale devastation of the air, water and vegetation on which all life depends, along with buildings and infrastructure," Knobloch said.

His group, the Union of Concerned Scientists, recommends the following policy steps:

- Declare that the sole purpose of US nuclear weapons is to deter and, if necessary, respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another country.
- Eliminate the ability to launch weapons within minutes, instead setting practices that allow for the launch of US nuclear forces in hours or days. Deterrence does not need to be prompt to be credible.
- Unilaterally reduce our nuclear arsenal to a total of 1,000 warheads, including deployed, spare, and reserve warheads.
- Promptly and unilaterally retire all US tactical nuclear weapons.
- Commit to not resume nuclear testing and to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
- Announce our commitment to further reductions in the number of nuclear weapons, on a negotiated and verified multilateral basis, and present a specific plan for moving toward this goal, in recognition that the universal and verifiable prohibition of nuclear weapons would be in the US national security interest.

To make this happen, Knobloch said the country need bipartisanship support. "We need to transcend ideology and partisan politics to do what is needed to make us safer," he said.

The Union of Concerned Scientists is the leading science-based nonprofit organization working for a

healthy environment and a safer world. Founded in 1969, it is headquartered in Cambridge, Mass., and has offices in Berkeley, Calif., and Washington, D.C.

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