

Nuclear SLCM Ban Act

Senator Chris Van Hollen and Representative Joe Courtney

Bill overview

- The Nuclear SLCM Ban Act will prohibit research and development, production, and deployment of the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (N-SLCM) and its associated nuclear warhead.

Background

- As part of his 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, President George H.W. Bush withdrew all N-SLCMs from Navy ships and placed them in storage. After determining in its Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) that the capability was redundant and that its mission could be fulfilled by other non-strategic systems, the Obama administration officially retired the N-SLCM in 2013.
- Seven years later, in its effort to expand U.S. nuclear warfighting capabilities and lower the nuclear threshold, the Trump administration initiated studies on a new N-SLCM, arguing in its NPR that restoring the capability would bolster regional nuclear deterrence and counter Russia's arsenal of non-strategic weapons.

Military/budgetary case against the N-SLCM

High cost: In its 2019 cost estimate of U.S. nuclear weapons programs, the CBO projected that the N-SLCM would cost \$9.0 billion from 2019-2028. This projection does not account for production costs after 2028, nor does it factor in costs associated with integrating the missile on ships (i.e. modifying existing launch tubes), nuclear weapons training for personnel, and storage and security for nuclear warheads on naval bases.

Redundant: The United States possesses an array of non-strategic nuclear capabilities – including heavy bombers equipped to carry gravity bombs and air-launched cruise missiles and short-range fighter jets capable of delivering gravity bombs – that fulfill our theater nuclear deterrence missions and reassure our allies of our extended deterrence commitments.

Impact on conventional navy missions: The N-SLCM is slated to be deployed on attack submarines or surface ships. Giving these vessels a nuclear mission risks hampering their core conventional missions, such as tracking enemy submarines and protecting U.S. carrier groups.

Allied port access: Several important U.S. allies, namely Japan and New Zealand, have a policy of denying U.S. vessels armed with nuclear weapons access to their ports. Precluding attack subs or surface ships armed with N-SLCMs from making resupply stops at allied ports would significantly reduce these vessels' operating range and patrol time.