

“No First Use”: An Empty Gesture That Would Cost Nothing

“Debate on ‘no first use’ of nukes mushrooms in Washington,” Joe Gould reports at *Defense News*. “Five years after President Barack Obama turned back from declaring a ‘no first use’ as US policy for nuclear weapons,” Gould writes, “opponents say the Biden administration is considering it too, and warn that it risks alienating allies.”

Is it really a big deal for the US government to affirm that it will not use nuclear weapons first in any future conflict?

US Senator Jim Risch (R-ID) says it would signal prospective enemies “that they can plan an attack and do whatever they want to and not worry.”

That argument might pass the smell test if anyone believed a word the US government said for public consumption, but the Washington foreign policy establishment enjoys no such credibility. The US does what it wants, when it wants, past commitments be damned, and no foreign power’s diplomats or generals (allied or hostile) are naive enough to expect otherwise.

A “no first use” proclamation, whether passed by Congress or simply announced by a president, would be the equivalent of an abusive husband buying flowers for his wife.

The flowers don’t mean he’s not going to throw her down the stairs the next time he comes home drunk, just like he did the last time and the time before that. Nor is she likely to take them that way. They’re just a nice, pretty, empty gesture.

Of course, the US government isn’t an abusive husband. It’s the world’s most powerful organized crime syndicate, and its nuclear arsenal is a key element in enforcing its global protection racket.

Like all such rackets, this one starts with a pseudo-friendly “nice country ya got there ... be a shame if anything happened to it.”

And as with all such rackets, the implication is that if the victim doesn’t fork over whatever’s demanded, he can expect to get pistol-whipped or perhaps thrown through a plate glass window for starters, and eventually have his establishment burned down if he doesn’t play ball.

The maintenance of a nuclear arsenal of any significant size — that is, larger than a handful of “deterrent” weapons — covers all those bases. A supposed “no first use” policy wouldn’t diminish the actual or perceived threat in any way. It would just be a nice, unconvincing

gesture. No big deal either way, so why pretend it's a matter of weighty policy debate?