

Secretary Antony J. Blinken's Remarks to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

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Good afternoon. Secretary General Guterres, President Zlatkovich – thank you – Director General Grossi: Thank you all for your longstanding leadership on nonproliferation.

I noted that Prime Minister Kishida of Japan is here as well this morning, which sends a very powerful message. Earlier this year, he reaffirmed Japan's commitment to nonproliferation in a joint statement with President Biden.

And a very special thanks to the foreign ministers, the deputy foreign ministers, the teams who have traveled to New York for these meetings and to get us off to a good start.

It's great to be with you all here in person today, especially – especially – given the critical role the NPT has played in upholding the global nonproliferation regime.

More than five decades ago, at the height of the Cold War, representatives of 18 nations drafted the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

In the years that followed, nearly every country on Earth has joined the NPT.

Countries put safeguards in place to monitor their nuclear programs.

Nuclear weapon states moved toward disarmament, including the United States. The number of nuclear weapons in our stockpile is now nearly 90 percent lower than it was at its height in 1967.

The United Nations Security Council affirmed that proliferation constituted a threat to international peace and security.

Entire regions – the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa – joined Latin America and the Caribbean in declaring themselves nuclear weapons-free zones.

And we saw countries use nuclear technology safely and peacefully to improve the lives of millions of people on Earth.

So there is no question that the NPT has made the world safer. But there's also no doubt that it's under increasing strain.

And so we come together at a critical moment.

The DPRK continues to expand its unlawful nuclear program and continues its ongoing provocations against the region. As we gather today, Pyongyang is preparing to conduct its seventh nuclear test.

Iran remains on a path of nuclear escalation. Although it publicly claims to favor return to mutual compliance with the JCPOA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, since March, Iran has been either unwilling or unable to accept a deal to achieve precisely that goal. Getting back to the JCPOA remains the best outcome – for the United States, for Iran, for the world.

In January, President Biden and the leaders of the other NPT nuclear weapon states – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom – all affirmed the principle that, and I quote, “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

The very next month, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. And it’s engaged in reckless, dangerous nuclear saber-rattling, with its president warning those supporting Ukraine’s self-defense, quote, “risk consequences...such as you have never seen in your entire history,” end quote.

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is a brazen violation of international law, including the United Nations Charter, and it’s also contrary to the rules-based international order that we all seek to uphold. But critically, and it’s directly relevant to what brings us together this month for the NPT Review Conference, its actions are also contrary to the assurances that it provided to Ukraine in 1994 in the so-called Budapest Memorandum, assurances of Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence that were vital to giving Ukraine the confidence to give up the nuclear weapons it inherited when the Soviet Union dissolved and that were left on its territory.

So what message does this send to any country around the world that may think that it needs to have nuclear weapons to protect, to defend, to deter aggression against its sovereignty and independence? The worst possible message. And so it’s directly relevant to what’s going on here this month at the United Nations.

Most recently, we saw Russia’s aggression with its seizure of Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest such plant in all of Europe. Russia is now using the plant as a military base to fire at Ukrainians, knowing that they can’t and won’t shoot back because they might accidentally strike a nuclear – a reactor or highly radioactive waste in storage. That brings the notion of having a human shield to an entirely different and horrific level.

The United States believes that all nuclear-armed states have a duty to act responsibly. We’ve chosen to act with restraint and avoid actions that could unintentionally add to nuclear tensions – for example, by forgoing previously scheduled ICBM tests and not raising the alert status of our nuclear forces in response to Russian saber-rattling. There is no place in our world – no place in our world – for nuclear deterrence based on coercion, intimidation, or blackmail. We have to stand together in rejecting this.

Together with the United Kingdom and France, we’ve released a set of principles and best practices that should be expected of every responsible NPT nuclear weapon state, among them that every effort has to be made to ensure that nuclear weapons are not used again.

The United States is committed to reducing the role of nuclear weapons and re-establishing our leadership on arms control, and we've undertaken a deliberate policy review toward that goal. We'll continue to emphasize strategic stability, seek to avoid costly arms races, facilitate risk reduction and arms control agreements wherever they are possible.

Any country that asks others to reject the pursuit of nuclear weapons also has to be willing to reduce – and eventually, eliminate – their own stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

President Biden's commitment to disarmament has long been evident. Just two weeks into his term, he extended the New START Treaty with Russia until 2026, and that's made our countries and our world safer by preserving verified restrictions on our strategic nuclear arsenals and avoiding an arms race. Earlier today, he reiterated his readiness to negotiate expeditiously a framework to replace New START, if Russia is prepared to operate in good faith.

We continue to adhere to our policy not to use – or threaten to use – nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are party to the NPT and are in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations. And we'll continue to implement, to the fullest extent possible, the commitments contained in the final documents of previous NPT Review Conferences.

And as long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attacks on the United States, on our allies, and partners. The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners.

At this Review Conference, we hope to make tangible progress on all three pillars of the NPT – nonproliferation, disarmament, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy – and we'll work with all states parties to a successful outcome.

The world must reject the spread of nuclear weapons.

That starts with demanding compliance by all NPT state parties, ensuring we have safeguards in place to monitor ourselves, strengthening the IAEA's ability to implement those safeguards. We're encouraging states to adopt a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and an Additional Protocol, which will represent together the most rigorous standard of verification.

If any NPT state party does pursue nuclear weapons, we have to act as one to bring them back into compliance.

Even as we verify that countries are not using their nuclear programs to pursue nuclear weapons, we also have to ensure that the programs are safe and secure.

I commend Director General Grossi for his work promoting the safety and security of existing facilities, and especially for all that he's done to help prevent a nuclear catastrophe in Ukraine.

This Review Conference is also an invaluable opportunity to discuss how to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict and the chance of miscommunication during a crisis.

The United States is committed to pursuing a comprehensive risk reduction package, including creating secure communications channels among nuclear weapon states. We stand ready to work with all partners, including China and others, on risk reduction and strategic stability efforts.

As we look to the future, we also have to strengthen agreements preventing nuclear conflict – and create new ones.

To cap the growth of nuclear arsenals anywhere in the world, we continue to support the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty. We also stand ready to begin working with partners to restart negotiations this year on the long delayed Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty.

Finally, we remain focused on enhancing the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

Nuclear energy technologies are helping the world to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and fight the climate crisis, giving farmers new tools to boost crop yields and tackle global food insecurity, improving our ability to screen for dangerous diseases, and preventing the next pandemic.

The United States wants to expand access to these essential benefits for NPT states parties.

Together with the United Kingdom, we're launching the Sustained Dialogue on Peaceful Uses to find new ways to use peaceful nuclear energy technology to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We're also supporting clean energy innovations – like small nuclear reactors – to combat climate change, ensure reliable access to nuclear power. At the G7 Leaders' Summit in Germany just last month, President Biden announced \$14 million in funding to support the deployment of small modular reactor power plants in Romania, which will provide zero-emissions nuclear energy.

Now, some have asked about our new partnership with the United Kingdom and Australia, known as AUKUS. Through this partnership, Australia will acquire submarines. I want to emphasize that these submarines will be nuclear powered, not nuclear armed. Other countries have this kind of submarine. And these will adhere to the highest safety and nonproliferation standards under the NPT. We're working very closely with the IAEA to make sure that that's the case.

As we work together across the three pillars of the NPT, we build upon the efforts of so many who have come before us in this room.

Last month, we lost one of those leaders: former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was deeply committed to nuclear nonproliferation throughout his career.

In 2016, Prime Minister Abe and President Obama made an historic visit to Hiroshima together – a place that represents the enormous destruction that nuclear weapons make possible.

There, President Obama said – and I quote – “We must have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them,” end quote.

Prime Minister Abe said this: “We are determined to realize a world free of nuclear weapons. No matter how long or how difficult the road [may] be.”

That has to remain the charge for each of us here – to escape the logic of fear and live up to our responsibility to prevent nuclear conflict, to reduce nuclear weapons, to secure nuclear technologies, to advance peace and progress around the world.

Thank you very much.