

2019 UN General Assembly First Committee

Delegation of the United States of America

General Debate Statement

by

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States Delegation, I congratulate you on your election as Chair of the First Committee. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau for their elections, and commit to working with each of you toward a successful session.

Mr. Chairman, next year's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference (RevCon) will mark the 50th anniversary of the NPT's entry into force. This commemoration should remind us of how well the NPT has served our shared security and prosperity now and for future generations. The RevCon is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitments to a strong nonproliferation regime that provides a framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation and a foundation for progress on nuclear disarmament.

The latest innovation in this field is the Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) Working Group launched in Washington in July. We invite colleagues to a side-event on October 14th in the ECOSOC Chamber to provide a read-out on the Working Group's efforts to date.

Together with CEND, the ongoing verification dialogues between states, in and out of the UN, can lead to real, tangible progress in the field of nuclear disarmament verification.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to focus the remainder of my remarks on the nature and root causes of the deteriorating security environment that impedes nuclear disarmament efforts today.

The United States remains committed to effective arms control that advances U.S., allied, and partner security; is verifiable and enforceable; and includes partners that comply responsibly with their obligations. We stand ready to engage with Russia and China on arms control negotiations that meet these criteria. The United States wants serious arms control that delivers real security to the American people and the world. Today, the Cold War approach, with its bilateral treaties that covered limited types of nuclear weapons or only certain ranges of adversary missiles, is no longer sufficient.

Mr. Chairman, we need a new era of arms control, one in which Russia and China are at the negotiating table and willing to reduce nuclear risks rather than heighten them. The stakes could not be higher. For the first time in history, the international community confronts two large autocratic powers with global reach and ambition – armed with nuclear weapons. We can no longer ignore the reality that Russia and China are determined to undermine the liberal democratic order established in the wake of the Second World War and upon which the United Nations was founded.

In response to this challenge, UN Member States need to reconsider the traditional dividing lines in multilateral disarmament fora. The key and growing difference among them is between democratically-oriented states who are accountable to their publics and undemocratic regimes focused on challenging the existing rules-based order.

Mr. Chairman, we have often highlighted the obvious and unbreakable relationship between security and disarmament. But what is also obvious is the clear relationship between disarmament and democracy. Today, undemocratic regimes such as Russia and China are expanding their arsenals and engaging in activities that impede our ability to make progress on disarmament. They are revisionist in their aims and bent on deploying new, destabilizing weapons. If this trend continues, China's and Russia's increasing military might will eventually provide them with the means to dismantle the liberal democratic order upon which our security and prosperity depend.

Russia is a serial violator of its arms control and European security commitments and pursues a deliberate strategy to undermine its neighbors' sovereignty. Russia

has failed to comply with its obligations under not only the now-defunct Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, but also the Open Skies Treaty, the Vienna Document, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the moratorium on nuclear weapons tests – all of which the United States continues to adhere. Only Moscow is to blame for the INF Treaty's demise. Russia's efforts to modernize its nuclear forces have not involved just a replacement of aging systems. Instead, Russia has invented new weapons of war that harken back to an age when a nuclear balance of terror reigned.

These new weapons, some of which would not be subject to the New START Treaty, include a nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed underwater drone designed to destroy cities and ports in radioactive tidal waves. And Russia also has much to answer for regarding the August 8th "Skyfall" incident. The United States has determined that the explosion near Nenoksa, Russia, was the result of a nuclear reaction that occurred during the recovery of a Russian nuclear-powered cruise missile. The missile remained on the bed of the White Sea since its failed test early last year, in close proximity to a major population center.

Mr. Chairman, ensuring global security also requires adhering to and strengthening the prohibitions created by the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. During High-Level Week, U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo announced the U.S. determination that the Assad regime used chlorine as a weapon on May 19th in an attack in Latakia, Syria. The regime's pattern of chemical weapons use against its own people cannot be tolerated. Such atrocities threaten to desensitize the world to the use and proliferation of chemical weapons and must end. Russia must take concrete actions to prevent the Assad regime from using chemical weapons.

China's military expansion is aimed at establishing regional dominance and global influence. China has amassed a vast intermediate-range, ground-launched missile arsenal under no international restraints; today the United States has no such missiles. Simultaneously, China is expanding its nuclear arsenal – all the while resisting meaningful bilateral dialogue with the United States on nuclear arms control and risk reduction. Precisely because China is the least transparent member of the P5 and is engaged in an ongoing arms-buildup, it is hard to take China at its word on nuclear issues. China must come to realize that continued silence on its part is destabilizing.

To prevent further deterioration in the security environment and raise the prospects for disarmament, the United States calls on all like-minded states to coordinate in new and better ways to persuade Russia and China to change course; to cease their

aggressive policies that undermine the rules-based order and make it dangerous for responsible democratic states to lower their defenses. Similarly, democratic states need to call out Russia's and China's use of authoritarian satellites to stymie progress, such as Iran and Venezuela.

This call to action is addressed not only to America's traditional democratic allies, though they remain essential to our mutual security. It is also a call to UN Member States from every region of the world that value the democratic way of life and share a sincere interest in further progress on disarmament. Together, we should demand that Russia and China join the United States at the negotiating table in good faith, to initiate a new era of arms control for the sake of international peace and security.

To further advance this new dialogue, immediately after today's General Debate session, we will be co-hosting another side-event, here in Conference Room 4, and open to everyone, on "Promoting Stability in the Indo-Pacific in the Context of Great Power Competition."

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to building new bridges to a broad coalition of states on the relationship between disarmament and democracy and the need for a new era of arms control.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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