

**Statement by the United States in Cluster 1: Nuclear Disarmament and Security Assurances**

**Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

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Permanent Representative of the United States  
to the Conference on Disarmament**

**April 26, 2018**

Mr. Chairman,

The United States welcomes the opportunity to discuss our approach to nuclear disarmament and, in particular, to negative security assurances.

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to efforts in support of the ultimate elimination of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. U.S. efforts to deter aggression, ensure strategic stability, and promote international peace and security have succeeded in reducing the U.S. nuclear stockpile by 88 percent since the height of the Cold War, and, under the central limits of the New START arms agreement, the United States and Russia have capped our respective deployed strategic forces at their lowest levels since the 1950s. The NPR further affirmed that the United States remains committed to arms control efforts where they advance U.S., allied, and partner security, are verifiable and enforceable, and include partners that comply responsibly with their obligations.

Mr. Chairman,

We note that the global security environment has deteriorated markedly in recent years. Nor are we alone in this view. In this increasingly diverse and challenging threat environment, the United States will maintain an effective nuclear deterrent to defend the United States, our allies, and partners, to deter aggression, and help ensure and preserve international peace and stability. To help ensure the effectiveness of this deterrent, the 2018 NPR articulates a declaratory policy that clarifies the circumstances under which the United States would – and would not – consider the use of nuclear weapons.

Consistent with long-standing U.S. policy, we are not prepared to offer or negotiate a universal, unconditional legally-binding negative security assurance. However, the 2018 NPR reaffirms our voluntary negative security assurance: “The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.” This approach seeks to deter potential adversaries, while also highlighting the security benefits to states that honor their nuclear non-proliferation commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

Contrary to what some have claimed, the 2018 NPR does not expand the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. policy. It instead seeks to keep the threshold for nuclear use high by ensuring that any potential adversary would find the prospect of nuclear use profoundly unattractive. The 2018 review makes clear that: “The United States would only consider the employment of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners.” This is the same language that appeared in the 2010 NPR.

The 2018 NPR further clarifies this statement by providing specific examples that could constitute extreme circumstances; it states: “Extreme circumstances could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks. These attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on the U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control, or warning and attack assessment capabilities.” Let me stress that while this clarity is an improvement upon previous statements, this policy is not new. Previous policies were deliberately somewhat more ambiguous as to what “extreme circumstances” might entail. The more explicit 2018 policy statement, however, enhances deterrence by describing some of the circumstances that might lead the United States to consider a nuclear response. Let me also stress that this does not imply any sort of “automaticity” as to the use of nuclear weapons. Quite the contrary. Any U.S. decision to employ nuclear weapons would follow a deliberative process and only the President can authorize their employment. Our declaratory policy simply identifies, in the interest of improving deterrence, circumstances in which we are unwilling categorically to rule out the possibility of a nuclear response.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States remains committed to the long-term goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons, and we look forward to working with all states to create the conditions that could facilitate further nuclear disarmament. This includes working with states to address the factors in the international security environment that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.