

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

**Third 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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Mr. Chairman,

In our main Cluster I statement we focused on the need to remain vigilant and address the challenging global security environment. The United States welcomes the opportunity to take the floor again to discuss security assurances in particular.

The United States is committed to efforts in support of the ultimate elimination of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, a commitment reiterated in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). History illustrates not only the steadfast U.S. commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament, but also that progress on this front is inherently tied to the international security environment. 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,

The path forward necessarily runs first and foremost through addressing the security challenges that motivate nuclear weapons acquisition and retention. In our Cluster I statement, we spoke to the fact that the global security environment has deteriorated markedly in recent years. In the 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 to 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 U.S. reaffirmed in the 2018 NPR that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon 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 role of nuclear weapons in U.S. policy has not been expanded. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review makes that clear: “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 element of our declaratory policy reflects continuity with long-standing U.S. policy.

An important element of maintaining effective deterrence is the articulation of U.S. declaratory policy regarding the potential employment of nuclear weapons. The NPR therefore goes further to clarify the illustrative types of non-nuclear attack that could constitute “extreme circumstances,” including attacks on the United States, 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. The NPR seeks to keep the threshold for nuclear use – and indeed to prevent such use – high by ensuring that any potential adversary would find the prospect of aggression profoundly unattractive.

The more explicit 2018 policy statement enhances deterrence by describing some of the circumstances that might lead the United States to consider a nuclear response. Let me also stress unequivocally 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 – and of both honesty and transparency – circumstances in which we are unwilling categorically to rule out the possibility of a nuclear response.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States stands ready to work with all states toward the long-term goal of the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. In order to achieve this goal, we must work to remedy the circumstances in the global security environment that currently make nuclear deterrence necessary. We welcome all states to join us in seeking common solutions to our collective challenges.