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BUILDING A SAFER WORLD



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STATEMENT BY THE EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY LEADERSHIP GROUP (EASLG)

Prepared for Presidents, Prime Ministers, Parliamentarians, and Publics

Advancing Global Nuclear “Fail-Safe”

Since 1945, a combination of prudent leadership, military professionalism, good luck, and divine providence has enabled humanity to avoid using nuclear weapons. But the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine elevates such risks dramatically, the latest reminder of how a nuclear catastrophe can quickly rise to the surface in the “fog of war.”

Today, the danger that a terrible decision may be made to use nuclear weapons in a moment of crisis—based on faulty judgment, false warnings of attack, or other miscalculation—is growing. There is also the potential for adversaries, including nonstate actors, to resort to cyberattacks to disrupt the command and control of nuclear weapons and early-warning systems. **The need for urgent action is clear: Each nation with nuclear arms has a responsibility to reduce the risk of nuclear blunder, and nations must work together to eliminate nuclear risks and threats, and avoid any military clash of nuclear powers.**

Reducing and eliminating nuclear risks—relating to both nuclear weapons and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy—that could lead to catastrophic consequences is a common interest for all nations. It is an enduring responsibility of all nuclear-armed states, particularly as it relates to the obligations of the five Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) nuclear-weapons states and the alliances of which they are members. In January 2022, the leaders of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States together affirmed that “**a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.**” This principle is fundamental to ensuring predictability and reducing the threat of nuclear war.

More must be done now to build on this principle. Without practical steps to reduce nuclear risks, conflict leading to nuclear catastrophe becomes an ever-higher possibility.

NUCLEAR “FAIL-SAFE”

In June 2021, the EASLG called on all nuclear-weapons states to commit to conduct internal reviews of their nuclear command-and-control systems, including “fail-safe”

steps to strengthen safeguards against cyber threats and unauthorized, inadvertent, or accidental use of a nuclear weapon. The United States recently has begun to undertake such a review; other nuclear-weapons states should lead with their own internal fail-safe reviews. When completed, results from these internal reviews could be shared, for example, by the NPT nuclear-weapons states in the context of the NPT P5 Process.

In today’s international security environment unilateral steps to increase resilience against nuclear use are essential, yet risk reduction also demands cooperative measures. **Hence, dialogue on these issues between nuclear-weapons states must be restored irrespective of current circumstances. This includes the bilateral strategic stability dialogue agreed to by the United States and Russia in June 2021, including their commitment to lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures.**

In parallel with such dialogue, internal fail-safe reviews could lead to proposals for bilateral and multilateral cooperative risk reduction measures that could be taken by nuclear-weapons states, including steps to increase warning and decision times for leaders. This could include establishing cyber-nuclear “rules of the road” and red-line understandings precluding cyberattacks on nuclear facilities, nuclear command-and-control structures, or early warning systems.

For too long, the risk of an accident, mistake, or miscalculation leading to broader conflict, including nuclear use, has loomed over all of us. Nuclear-weapons states and their allies must give themselves every feasible tool to prevent a mistake or blunder from turning into a catastrophe beyond imagination.

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