



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

Prepared for Presidents, Prime Ministers, Parliamentarians, and Publics

Three Essential Steps for Reversing the Slide to Nuclear War

Reducing and eliminating any nuclear risk that could lead to catastrophe is a common interest for all and an enduring responsibility for all nuclear-armed states. 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**” and that strategic risk reduction was among their foremost responsibilities. These vital principles are fundamental to ensuring predictability, building trust, and reducing the danger of nuclear war. They should continuously and publicly be reaffirmed by leaders in both nuclear and non-nuclear armed states and constantly reinforced through enhanced public awareness efforts.

Over the past three years, the reality of, and potential for, wars by nuclear-armed nations have created a yet more urgent context for the January 2022 statement. **More must be done now by the “N5” and all other nuclear armed nations to build on its principles.** Without practical steps to reduce nuclear risks, a conventional conflict preceding a nuclear catastrophe—whether by design or by blunder—becomes an ever-greater possibility.

The Euro-Atlantic region has an essential role to play in reducing nuclear dangers: four of the N5 nuclear-weapon states recognized in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), including the United States and Russia, and more than 90 percent of global nuclear inventories, are located here. That said, the Asia-Pacific, South Asia and Middle East regions now encompass five other nuclear-armed states, with growing nuclear inventories and competing and possibly conflicting global interests characterizing every region. **Reducing nuclear risks is thus a global challenge requiring a global solution; hence, dialogue on nuclear risk reduction must be global.**

Washington and Moscow can make a crucial contribution by making clear they will not exceed current levels of deployed U.S.-Russian nuclear arms before the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) expires next year. In addition, the following urgent steps, **supported by nuclear-armed states in every region**, would build on the essential principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought:

1 Prevent a return to explosive nuclear testing and strengthen the existing testing moratoria.

Despite only North Korea's having tested since 1998, some are arguing for a resumption of nuclear explosive testing. A resumption of testing by any nation, especially any of those who are signatories to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), would almost certainly trigger nuclear tests by other nations and an even more precarious nuclear arms race. Renewed testing by any one or more of the N5 would severely undermine their individual and collective credibility and also risk the collapse of the NPT, whose extension in 1995 was linked to the conclusion of the CTBT.

Leaders of all nuclear-armed states should reaffirm their commitment to sustain the existing moratoria on explosive nuclear testing. Confidence in the existing moratoria would be strengthened if the United States, Russia, and China—bilaterally or together—could agree on transparency measures about activities at their respective test sites. Such measures could also lead to coordinated efforts to bring the CTBT into force.

2 Advance nuclear fail-safe in every nation with nuclear arms.

In February 2023, at the Munich Security Conference, the EASLG called on all nuclear-weapon states to lead with their own internal nuclear fail-safe reviews, including steps to strengthen safeguards against the unauthorized, inadvertent, or accidental use of a nuclear weapon based on faulty judgment, false warnings of attack, or other miscalculation. All nuclear-armed nations have a responsibility to prevent the accidental or mistaken use of a nuclear weapon; and all nations, nuclear and non-nuclear, have a shared interest in preventing such a calamity. We live in a time when dialogue and formal arms control increasingly have become challenging and the development of cyber-threats and artificial intelligence have compounded the risk of nuclear conflagration. Thus unilateral nuclear fail-safe reviews are something that every nuclear-armed state should do and strengthen as a matter of urgency. For example, the United States recently concluded a new and comprehensive fail-safe review of its own. Such reviews require no negotiation, treaty, or verification, and the sharing of results or actions is entirely at the discretion of each individual state.

Leaders of the N5 nations should now engage and demonstrate leadership on this topic. Acting unilaterally, bilaterally, trilaterally, or as a group, they should develop appropriate statements covering their commitment to nuclear fail-safe in advance of the 2026 NPT Review Conference. Such statements could include details about their fail-safe commitments and could highlight principles and best practices, including in crisis communication.

3 Affirm and strengthen the fundamental principles governing the use of outer space.

Today, more nations than ever are contributing to and benefiting from the exploration and use of outer space. In the past five years, more satellites have been launched by governments and commercial companies than in the previous six decades. More than 90 nations now have at least one satellite in orbit. Safeguarding the space environment and the uniquely positive benefits derived from it now constitute one of the principal challenges of the 21st century. All nations have a role to play.

Since the early 1960s, the United Nations has passed, and nations have concluded, a series of resolutions and agreements containing principles and obligations pertaining to the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. Today, those principles and obligations have been put at risk through the combination of technological development, including cyber and artificial intelligence, and the exploitation of space for military activities by an increasing number of nations. Furthermore, and underlining that space could become a battlefield, simulated and actual testing of anti-satellite weapons has been conducted by several nations, in some cases creating dangerous debris in space. Even the legally binding commitment to not place in orbit any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction appears at risk. Any use of these weapons would indiscriminately and devastatingly affect us all and render space unusable.

Leaders of nuclear-armed nations and other states parties to the Outer Space Treaty, many of whom possess or have the potential to develop capabilities to disrupt the peaceful use of outer space, should affirm the historic principles governing the use of outer space for peaceful purposes and begin a new space dialogue. Such a statement would communicate clearly that leaders recognize their responsibility to work together to prevent war in space. The statement could also lay the groundwork for practical steps to reduce risks, such as measures governing the testing and deployment of anti-satellite and other space weapons. It is crucial that space should remain regulated and free, not free of regulations.

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