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Remarks at NPT PrepCom Side Event on Technological Complexity and Nuclear Reduction: A Checklist and Guardrails Framework for EDTs in Nuclear Weapons Decision-making

REMARKS

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JULY 25, 2024

First, let me take the opportunity to thank the European Leadership Network and German Federal Foreign Office for hosting this discussion. This side event addresses incredibly important topics, which require new and innovative thinking to address.

The United States is firmly committed to reducing nuclear risks. Toward that end, emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) create both opportunities and challenges. If developed and deployed responsibly, applications of EDTs like AI could enhance stability, for instance providing high-quality information to decision makers, or unlocking new techniques for arms control verification. But we're also keenly aware of the potential for EDTs to impact nuclear risks.

As we consider the implications of EDTs, my bureau is looking at the full range of tools at our disposal to promote stability and in particular to address the risks of miscalculation and escalation. In this respect we see significant value in joint statements and commitments that can provide assurances regarding how States adopt these technologies.

We've reaffirmed one such commitment together with France and the UK in a paper submitted to the 2022 NPT Review Conference, that "we will maintain human control and involvement for all actions critical to informing and executing sovereign decisions concerning nuclear weapons employment." We think it's essential to draw this clear red line with respect to the use of AI and automation, and we have encouraged the PRC and Russia to do the same.

In addition, the joint paper we submitted with the UK and France acknowledged our special charge to be responsible custodians of nuclear weapons and to work persistently to achieve conditions that would allow for their ultimate elimination. We encourage you all to review this paper, which describes the many responsible actions the United States, UK, and France have taken in striking contrast to the other Nuclear Weapons States. Many of the actions described in the paper are also relevant to countering specific challenges related to EDTs.

We also believe the five Nuclear Weapons States should do more to reduce nuclear risks through the P5 process. Last year, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan laid out some specific proposals, including establishing crisis communications channels among our capitals; formalizing a missile launch notification regime that includes all P5 members; committing to transparency on nuclear policy, doctrine, and budgeting; and maintaining a "human-in-the-loop" for command and control of nuclear weapons.

Unfortunately, consensus has not been reached to move forward on these important proposals. Nonetheless, we will continue exploring opportunities to move the five nuclear

weapon states from dialogue to action on risk reduction proposals, and we will encourage Russia and the PRC to take a similarly constructive approach. Good thing Americans are known for our persistence, as we do not have time to lose here.

As this Guardrails report suggests, there are important steps that States can take individually to reduce nuclear risks and those posed specifically by EDTs. One such effort in the United States is the Failsafe review. Recognizing the challenges posed by emerging and disruptive technologies, Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to conduct an independent review of the safety, security, and reliability of nuclear weapons and related systems. This landmark study provides an extraordinary opportunity to comprehensively address risk areas in the face of a broad range of existing and forecasted threats. The findings from the Failsafe review will positively inform investments and policy decisions that aim to prevent risks of unauthorized or inadvertent use of nuclear weapons. Additionally, the report seeks to strengthen confidence-building safeguards and nuclear risk reduction measures that the United States can carry out alone or with near-peer adversaries.

Let me conclude my remarks by picking up on one other key theme from this Guardrails report. Risk reduction is in everyone's interests, including non-nuclear weapon states. None of us benefit from increased nuclear risks, including those posed by EDTs, and we can all contribute to related risk reduction efforts.

Reducing the risk of miscalculation and misunderstanding is essential to ensuring that competition does not veer into conflict. We believe this should be a shared objective, and one that the international community expects of responsible countries. We will continue to support and engage in existing risk reduction mechanisms, as well as work to develop additional measures.

We welcome collaboration with all states on reducing the risk of nuclear conflict and advancing progress towards disarmament, and we will continue to support such measures through the NPT Review Process.

Thank you again to ELN and Germany for your contributions to these efforts. I look forward to reviewing your report in more detail and considering how the tools and best practices you've developed could support our enduring global nuclear risk reduction efforts and help us address the unique challenges related to EDTs.