

Appendix to:

On the significance of nuclear deterrence in the Ukraine war, GEGENSTANDPUNKT 3-23

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**Remarks by National Security Advisor  
Jake Sullivan  
for the Arms Control Association (ACA) Annual Forum**

60 years ago next month—in grainy, black and white video—President Kennedy addressed the nation.

He was sitting behind the same Resolute desk that President Biden sits behind now nearly every day, and that I sit across from him nearly every day.

“My fellow citizens,” he said. “I speak to you tonight in a spirit of hope...Negotiations were concluded in Moscow on a treaty to ban all nuclear tests...”

After years of non-stop negotiations, or stop-and-start negotiations to be more precise—

Years of dialogue—

Years of commitment and courage—

Establishing the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was a huge moment.

Not only for our own national security. But for the security and stability of the world.

And as this group knows well, it was one of the first steps that would help slowly usher in an era of responsible arms control and nuclear deterrence measures.

An era where nations could compartmentalize the issues of strategic stability, even if they couldn’t cooperate on much anything else.

An era where adversaries could disagree and debate across basically every domain, but could always find ways to work together to limit nuclear risks.

An era where world leaders chose transparency even during times of tension—especially during times of tension—because what was at stake was too important, too vital to our shared future.

That is the foundation of nuclear stability and security that we’ve depended on for decades.

And it’s the foundation that the Arms Control Association has helped to uphold across generations.

But over the last few years—that foundation has begun to erode.

And today, we now stand at what our President would call an “inflection point” in our nuclear stability and security.

A point that demands new strategies for achieving the same goal we’ve held since the Cold War: Reduce the risk of nuclear conflict.

So today, I’d like to lay out what we’re endeavoring to do in pursuit of this.

I’ll start with the cracks in the foundation that we see—the new threats that are challenging the post-Cold War nuclear order.

And then I’ll walk through how we’re trying to adapt both our nuclear deterrence and our arms control strategies to meet this moment.

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As we’ve all seen recently, some of the major cracks in our nuclear foundation have come from Russia.

Last year, Russian forces recklessly attacked and seized the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant in Ukraine—the largest operational nuclear plant in Europe—with little concern for the potential catastrophic consequences of a nuclear incident.

Earlier this year, President Putin unlawfully suspended Russia’s implementation of the New START Treaty that places limits on the most destructive weapons in our arsenals—the kinds that could destroy the world many times over.

Only a month later, President Putin began to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

And, as we all saw just a few days ago, Putin formally announced that he will withdraw from the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe—putting the final nail in the coffin of an agreement that once served as a cornerstone of European security, which Moscow began violating years ago.

But even prior to Russia's brutal assault against Ukraine, Putin has been destabilizing the nuclear foundation our forebearers laid.

For years, he's advanced the development of dangerous new nuclear capabilities, like radiation-spewing, nuclear-powered cruise missiles—all while modernizing and stockpiling old capabilities that aren't regulated by arms control agreements—like theater-range missiles and torpedoes.

Russia's actions have been dealing body blows to the post-Cold war nuclear arms control framework.

But it's not just Russia that we have to look to, to consider the full scope of the context we find ourselves in today with respect to nuclear security and stability.

We've also seen a change in approach from the People's Republic of China.

By 2035, the PRC is on track to have as many as 1,500 nuclear warheads—one of the largest peacetime nuclear build-ups in history.

But unlike Russia—who is threatening to walk away from the negotiating table, from the arms control agreements our countries have relied upon for years—the PRC has thus far opted not to come to the table for substantive dialogue on arms control.

It has declined to share the size and scope of its nuclear forces, or to provide launch notifications.

And it has not shown much interest in discussions regarding the changes it is making to its nuclear forces.

Simply put, we have not yet seen a willingness from the PRC to compartmentalize strategic stability from broader issues in the relationship. And that compartmentalization, as I noted before, has been the bedrock of nuclear security—indeed strategic stability—for decades.

Finally—we're seeing increasing nuclear threats from the DPRK and Iran.

In the last year alone, Kim Jung Un declared that he aimed to have quote, "the world's most powerful," nuclear arsenal—announcing plans to ramp up the development of everything from tactical nukes, to ICBMs, to unmanned underwater nuclear weapons.

He announced a sweeping new "Nuclear Forces Policy Law" that would permit Pyongyang to use nuclear weapons first against non-nuclear states—in direct violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the NPT.

And, he has tested more ballistic missiles than any other period in the DPRK's history.

On Iran—after the previous Administration's departure from a deal that put strict limits on Tehran's nuclear development, and prevented it from obtaining a nuclear weapon—Iran's nuclear program was left unconstrained.

As a result, Iran is now operating more advanced centrifuges. It has enriched more uranium, including at levels closer to weapons grade. And it has done so with less international monitoring of its program, than when it was under the strict constraints of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

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Taken together, the cracks in our post-Cold War nuclear foundation are substantial and they are deep.

And today, we're entering a new era—one that demands new strategies and solutions to achieve the goals we've always had:

Prevent an arms race.

Reduce the risk of misperception and escalation.

And most importantly, ensure the safety and security of our people—and people around the world—from nuclear threats.

Same goals, new strategy.

That's the core of our approach to strategic stability—one that can be boiled down to two main lines of effort.

First, update our deterrence capabilities and plans. And second, advance new arms control and risk reduction measures.

These are two sides of the same proverbial nuclear coin.

Responsibly enhancing our deterrent capabilities allows us to negotiate arms control from a position of strength and confidence—and new arms control helps limit and shape our adversaries' decisions on nuclear capabilities.

And so today, I'd like to spend a little time discussing each of these sides of the nuclear coin.

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I'll start with the deterrence side of the coin—where we're taking a two-pronged approach.

First—we're modernizing our nuclear program here at home.

In practice, that means replacing each leg of our nuclear Triad—land-based ICBMs, ballistic missile submarines, and nuclear-capable bombers.

It means updating our nuclear command, control, and communications architecture by replacing aging capabilities with next generation systems.

And it means investing in our nuclear complex and defense industry to help ensure that we have a responsive nuclear enterprise and a resilient base for long-term competition.

And I want to be clear here—the United States does not need to increase our nuclear forces to outnumber the combined total of our competitors in order to successfully deter them.

We've been there. We've learned that lesson.

Nor does the United States need to deploy ever-more dangerous nuclear weapons to maintain deterrence.

Rather, effective deterrence means that we have a “better” approach—not a “more” approach.

It means ensuring that we have the capacity and capabilities necessary to deter—and if necessary, defeat—major aggression against our country, our allies, and our partners.

So to enhance that effectiveness, we're investing in cutting-edge non-nuclear capabilities that will help sustain our military advantage for decades to come.

Capabilities like conventionally-armed hypersonic missiles that can reach heavily-defended, high-value targets—in contrast to the nuclear-capable missiles of similar kind that Russia and China are developing.

And capabilities like new space and cyberspace tools that will help the United States retain its advantage across every domain.

Together, these modernization efforts will ensure our deterrent capabilities remain secure and strong as we head into the 2030s—when the United States will need to deter two near-peer nuclear powers for the first time in its history.

But we can't go at it alone—which leads me to the second prong of our deterrence strategy: investing in and strengthening our alliances abroad.

That has been President Biden's overriding priority—indeed in many ways, his strategic North Star—since his very first day as President of the United States.

And, as we've worked to further deepen our alliances, we've always remembered that one of our greatest nonproliferation accomplishments of the nuclear age has been U.S. extended deterrence—which has reassured so many of our partners that they do not need to develop nuclear weapons of their own.

For example, in April, the President reaffirmed our ironclad mutual defense treaty with the Republic of Korea—including our extended deterrence commitment.

And together with President Yoon, he signed the Washington Declaration—a step that created more mechanisms for cooperation between our two countries—including during a potential nuclear crisis—and showed a recommitment to our shared nonproliferation objectives.

Together with our NATO Allies, we've been laser focused on modernizing the Alliance's nuclear capabilities—from ensuring broad participation in the Alliance's nuclear deterrent mission, to certifying our F-35 aircraft to be able to deliver modern nuclear gravity bombs.

All of these new steps—from revitalizing our nuclear program here at home, to reinvigorating our alliances abroad, and all of the elements that fall into those two categories—are necessary in their own right.

But taken together, they'll help achieve the same strategic stability goals we've always had.

They'll show our adversaries and competitors that in an arms race with the United States—that any arms race with the United States—is counterproductive at best, and destructive at worst.

And, they'll help the United States negotiate arms control agreements from that position of strength and confidence that I described.

Those arms control agreements are the other side of the “nuclear coin”—which is what I'd like to turn to next.

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Nearly 20 years ago—when then-Senator Biden addressed the Arms Control Association—and Tom talked about President Biden's very long-standing commitment to non-proliferation objectives and his long experience in being a leader in this space—he said quote, “we must invent new approaches and foster new international cooperation to meet changing threats.”

Those words only ring more true today.

And under the President's leadership, we're advancing three new approaches to strengthen arms control and decrease nuclear risks in this changing nuclear age.

First—we have stated our willingness to engage in bilateral arms control discussions with Russia and with China without preconditions.

And before I jump into this—let me just step back and say that “without preconditions” does not mean “without accountability.”

We'll still hold nuclear powers accountable for reckless behavior. And we'll still hold our adversaries and competitors responsible for upholding nuclear agreements.

For example—the United States will continue to notify Russia in advance of ballistic missile launches and major strategic exercises, in line with pre-existing nuclear agreements.

But yesterday, we adopted lawful, proportionate, and reversible countermeasures in response to Russia's violations of New START—including suspending our day-to-day notifications to Russia that are required under the Treaty.

These steps will help guarantee that Russia does not receive benefits from a treaty they refuse to abide by, and that the principle of reciprocity—a key tenet of strategic arms control—is upheld.

It will also demonstrate to Russia the benefits of returning to full compliance—including once again receiving detailed information regarding our nuclear forces—a conversation we continue to press for directly with Russian officials.

But, while claiming to suspend New START, Russia has also publicly committed to adhere to the Treaty's central limits—indicating a potential willingness to continue limiting strategic nuclear forces through 2026.

We agree.

It is in neither of our countries' interests to embark on an open-ended competition in strategic nuclear forces—and we're prepared to stick to the central limits as long as Russia does.

And rather than waiting to resolve all of our bilateral differences—the United States is ready to engage Russia now to manage nuclear risks and develop a post-2026 arms control framework. We are prepared to enter into those discussions.

Now—the type of limits the United States can agree to after the Treaty expires will of course be impacted by the size and scale of China's nuclear buildup.

That's why we're also ready to engage China without preconditions—helping ensure that competition is managed, and that competition does not veer into conflict.

It's our hope that among the topics on the table for diplomatic discussion, Beijing will be willing to include substantive engagement on strategic nuclear issues—which would benefit the security of both of our countries, and the security of the entire world.

Next—the United States is willing to engage in new multilateral arms control efforts, including through the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the P5: The United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France.

We're under no illusions that reaching risk reduction and arms control measures in that setting will be easy.

But we do believe it is possible.

And as you all know, four of the five nuclear powers are—with some exceptions that I just mentioned—already de facto committed to some transparency and restraint in their nuclear policies and postures.

The U.S., the UK, and France have also all demonstrated their commitments repeatedly to responsible behavior.

And—some of the P5 have nuclear agreements with each other. For example, the U.S. and Russia have a ballistic missile launch notification agreement with each other, which I mentioned before. So do Russia and China.

But these existing agreements are limited and piecemeal.

We can do more.

The P5 provides an opportunity manage nuclear risk and arms race pressures through a mix of dialogue, transparency, and agreements.

For example, formalizing a missile launch notification regime across the P5 is a straightforward measure that is simply common sense.

It's a small step that would help reduce the risk of misperception and miscalculation in times of crisis.

And one that could potentially build momentum toward further measures to manage nuclear risks and arms racing—

From maintaining a “human-in-the-loop” for command, control, and employment of nuclear weapons—

To establishing crisis communications channels among the P5 capitals—

To committing to transparency on nuclear policy, doctrine, and budgeting—

To setting up guardrails for managing the interplay between non-nuclear strategic capabilities and nuclear deterrence—

These are all areas where we could take further steps in a multilateral context, working among the P5.

This leads to my third and final point—the United States will step up to help set the norms and shore up the values of the new nuclear era.

We're already making some progress, including across every major multilateral body that seeks to limit nuclear and WMD risks.

The Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference.

The Conference on Disarmament.

The Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Biological Weapons Convention.

Across all of these forums—we're leading results-based discussions.

And we're ensuring that our frameworks are fit for the threats we face today and tomorrow.

For example—the fielding of weapons based on emerging technologies will create new, interconnected, and unpredictable escalation pathways.

So, we're working to establish new guardrails—especially in space and cyberspace.

And of course, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence, this entire picture only becomes more complex and challenging and requires the new kinds of approaches that I've been describing throughout the speech.

The approach that we are looking at takes into account technologies and tools that could complicate a potential nuclear conflict—like hypersonic weapons, like AI-enabled systems.

And as the President often says—we're making sure that we're leading not just by the example of our power, but by the power of our example.

That's why we've committed to not conduct destructive, direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing—and we're encouraging our Allies, partners, and competitors to do the same.

And it's why we've put forth proposals for responsible behavior in space and principles for the use of AI in the military domain—both of which we are actively promoting in international fora.

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Let me close with this.

60 years ago—President Kennedy spoke to our nation in the “spirit of hope.” That's how he put it—the spirit of hope.

Hope that we could safely manage strategic competition.

That we would one day build a world free of nuclear weapons.

That we could forge a future of greater peace, greater stability, and greater security.

Not just for Americans—but for everyone.

Today—as we face new threats and as we face those cracks in our post-Cold War nuclear foundation—I not only believe that we can find this hope again.

I believe that we must.

Because when it comes to nuclear risks, what is at stake—for our people, and for our world—is too important, too consequential for our shared futures not to.

We are under no illusions about the task at hand—of the hard work, and likely the long work needed to help lay a new, stronger foundation for this era.

But through new deterrence and arms control measures—one fit for this age—we can turn this moment of peril into a moment of possibility.

And I look forward to working with all of you to do just that—and I'm looking forward to the conversation this morning.