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U.S. Leadership in Strategic Risk Reduction*

Working paper submitted by the United States of America

U.S. Priority: Strategic Risk Reduction

- Advancing strategic risk reduction agreements, arrangements, and discussions among nuclear-weapon States (NWS) remains a top priority for the United States. Strategic risk reduction measures contribute to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Article VI goals by helping to lay the groundwork for arms control and related disarmament agreements. Strategic risk reduction is also important for reducing tensions, enhancing transparency, and building trust in the current international security environment. The United States has a long history of negotiating and implementing measures aimed at reducing the risk of strategic misunderstanding and conflict and preventing nuclear war. We include the list below to illustrate past work but also possible ideas for future engagement on this important topic.

Long History of U.S. Support for Risk Reduction Measures

- The United States has hotlines, military deconfliction communication channels, and has engaged in expert and senior-level discussions on nuclear postures and strategic stability with Russia. We have also employed a whole series of confidence-building measures in the form of agreements and arrangements on ballistic missile launches, strategic exercises, and other activities that might provoke misunderstandings or lead to conflict, including incidents at sea. Collectively, these agreements and arrangements help to make nuclear conflict much less likely.

* The present document is issued without formal editing.



Examples of existing and past U.S. risk reduction measures include:

- **Hotline Agreements**

- **1963 U.S.-Soviet Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link**

- **1998 U.S.-People’s Republic of China (PRC) Agreement on the Establishment of a Direct Telephone Link**

Benefit: Hotline agreements create direct, secure channels for rapid communication to reduce the risk of misunderstanding in crisis situations and to reduce the risk of conflict and use of nuclear weapons. The U.S.-Soviet hotline was frequently used during the Cold War. The success of this hotline led to the 1987 agreement to create the U.S. and Soviet (now Russian) Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers (see below), which have been instrumental in implementing numerous arms control and risk reduction agreements and arrangements.

- **National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers**

- **1987 U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers (as amended in 2013)**

Benefits: Risk reduction centers provide a rapid, reliable, and secure means for exchanging notifications under a number of disarmament, arms control, and confidence-building agreements and arrangements. Complementing the role of crisis management hotlines, risk reduction centers aim to prevent crises from arising by reducing the risk of miscommunications, misunderstandings, or miscalculations among partners. Currently, the U.S. National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Center provides 24-hour, seven-day-a-week, direct government-to-government communications to exchange notifications with over 90 international partners, on issues ranging from nuclear disarmament to conventional arms control, chemical weapons destruction, ballistic missile launch notifications, and international cyber incidents.

- **Ballistic Missile Launch Notifications**

- **1988 U.S.-Soviet Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement (BMLNA)** (followed by notification provisions in the START I Treaty and the New START Treaty and preceded by notification provisions in the 1971 U.S.-Soviet Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War (Accidents Measures Agreement), which remains in force, and the SALT II Treaty, which never entered into force.)

- **2002 Hague Code of Conduct (HCOC) against Ballistic Missile Proliferation** (the United States, Britain, France, and Russia are among the 138 Subscribing States.)

Benefits: These arrangements reduce the risk of nuclear war, particularly through misinterpretation, miscalculation, or accident, by providing information in advance on ballistic missile launches. Under the U.S.-Soviet BMLNA, the United States and the Soviet Union (since succeeded by Russia) agreed to provide each other with notifications no less than 24 hours in advance of the planned date of ICBM and SLBM launches. Notifications included information on the launch area and area of impact for such launches. Notifications of ICBM and SLBM launches under the New START Treaty are provided in accordance with the BMLNA. In addition, the 1971 Accidents Measures Agreement requires advance notification of any planned missile launches if such launches will extend beyond a Party’s national territory in the direction of the

other Party. Under the HCOC, 138 Subscribing States receive pre-launch notifications on ballistic missile and space-launch vehicle (SLV) launches and test flights submitted by fellow subscribers, as well as have access to annual declarations from each Subscribing State that provides details of their country's policies on ballistic missiles and SLV programs.

- **Mutual De-targeting**

- **1994 U.S.-Russia Presidential Declaration on Mutual De-targeting (Moscow Declaration)**

Benefits: This joint declaration announced the commitment of both sides not to target their respective ICBMs and SLBMs at each other. Due to this de-targeting, in the extremely unlikely event of an accidental launch of a U.S. nuclear weapon, the weapon would land in the open ocean.

- **Prevention of Nuclear War**

- **1973 U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War**

Benefits: This agreement obligates each State Party to “act in such a manner as to prevent the development of situations capable of causing a dangerous exacerbation of their relations, as to avoid military confrontations, and as to exclude the outbreak of nuclear war between them and between either of the Parties and other countries,” and to “proceed from the premise that each Party will refrain from the threat or use of force against the other Party, against the allies of the other Party and against other countries, in circumstances which may endanger international peace and security.” The agreement also obligates the parties to immediately enter into urgent consultations if there is a risk of nuclear war between them and to make every effort to avert this risk.

- **Notification of Major Strategic Exercises**

- **1989 U.S.-Soviet Agreement on Reciprocal Advance Notification of Major Strategic Exercises (followed by notification provisions under the START I and New START Treaties)**

Benefits: Pursuant to this agreement, the parties provide each other with notifications no less than 14 days in advance of major strategic forces exercises that include the participation of heavy bomber aircraft. Providing information in advance on the movement of nuclear-capable aircraft can reduce the risk of outbreak of nuclear war through misinterpretation, miscalculation, or accident. Notifications of major strategic exercises under the New START Treaty are provided in accordance with the 1989 agreement.

- **Incidents in the Air and at Sea**

- **1972 U.S.-Soviet Agreement on Incidents at Sea (with 1973 Protocol and 1998 Exchange of Notes)**

- **2014 U.S.-PRC Memorandum of Understanding on Rules of Behavior for the Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters**

Benefits: These arrangements reduce the risk of serious unintended confrontation and promote safety of operations when military vessels and aircraft operate in close proximity to each other by establishing mutually understood rules for operations and communications. The U.S.-Soviet agreement substantially reduced the number of incidents as compared to before the agreement. The United States and PRC have

conducted Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) meetings since 1998, with the notable exception of 2020.

- **Dangerous Military Incidents**

- **1989 U.S.-Soviet Agreement**

Benefits: This agreement reduces the risk of serious, unintended confrontation between forces as both sides work to avoid the listed dangerous military incidents, providing a framework for resolving any such incident expeditiously and peacefully, and promoting safety of operations where forces operate close to each other. The agreement calls for annual meetings.

- **Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War**

- **1971 U.S.-Soviet Accidents Measures Agreement**

Benefit: This agreement reduces the risk of misinterpretation by obligating the parties to notify each other immediately about any accidental, unexplained, or unauthorized nuclear use involving a possible detonation of a nuclear weapon that could create a risk of outbreak of nuclear war. Notifications are to be facilitated by use of the “Hotline.”

- **Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures**

- **First adopted in 1990 as an instrument of military confidence-building between participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with updated versions issued in 1992, 1994, 1999, and 2011.**

Benefits: The Vienna Document is a politically binding arrangement that provides for the exchange of information about military forces, notification and observation of military activities such as exercises, inspections of specified areas, evaluation visits to military units, and a risk reduction consultative mechanism in the case of unusual military activities. All 57 participating States of the OSCE, including the United States, Canada, and Russia, have made a political commitment to implement the measures in the Vienna Document.

- **Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)**

- **1990 Treaty signed by the United States, the Soviet Union, member states of NATO, and member states of the Warsaw Pact.**

Benefits: This treaty has been a cornerstone of European security since 1990 by providing transparency about conventional military weapons and equipment through limitations on conventional arms in 30 countries, data exchanges, and intrusive verification measures. The area of application consists of all the States Parties’ territory stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains.

Bilateral Risk Reduction

- By an agreement that entered into force on February 3, 2021, the United States and Russian Federation extended the New START Treaty for five years. Following the June 2021 Summit between President Biden and President Putin, the United States and Russia recommitted themselves to their bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue (SSD), which met in July and September 2021 and produced

a decision to form expert working groups. On January 10, 2022, the United States and Russia held an extraordinary session of the SSD to discuss the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. The United States was prepared at that session of the SSD to discuss a range of reciprocal arms control and confidence-building measures, hear Russian security concerns, and explain U.S. concerns. After the meeting, the United States was prepared to meet again soon to discuss bilateral issues in more detail. Instead, Russia chose war over diplomacy and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, resulting in the suspension of the SSD.

- Engaging the PRC in meaningful discussions on strategic stability, reducing risk, and increasing mutual understanding is also a priority for the United States. President Biden has raised with President Xi the need for these conversations between the United States and the PRC.

Multilateral Risk Reduction Activities

- The United States has continued to engage in multilateral work on strategic risk reduction via the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) initiative. CEND Subgroup 3 is currently focused on identifying risk reduction measures to create a menu of practical and actionable risk reduction options that could be pursued to prevent future crises from escalating. UN-based and ad hoc activities focused on future nuclear disarmament verification efforts are another example of ways in which the international community can engage in structured and substantive activities to identify solutions for difficult issues bearing on progress toward nuclear disarmament.
- As the chair of the P5 Process, the United States will pursue meaningful dialogue among the five NPT NWS, with the objective of developing and implementing tangible, actionable risk reduction measures. Even in the current climate, it should be acknowledged that risk reduction remains an essential tool for conflict management and is of immediate relevance to the attainment of NPT Article VI goals. As conditions allow, we will explore whether the examples of risk reduction arrangements listed in this paper might be useful as models for new arrangements designed to expand their application and for use in averting potential crises and destabilizing arms races.
- The United States welcomes engagement with non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) and nongovernmental organizations on strategic risk reduction measures. This includes constructive risk reduction proposals from the Stockholm Initiative and the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, both of which have called on the NWS to pursue such measures as affirming the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought; enhancing transparency and reporting on nuclear arsenals and plans for modernization; reviewing nuclear doctrine with the aim of reducing the role of nuclear weapons; expanding and intensifying dialogues among NWS on strategic stability; setting up a dedicated work stream on strategic risk reduction in the context of the P5 dialogue; engaging NNWS as part of these efforts; establishing hotlines and joint data centers; and implementing notification and data exchanges.
- The United States supports each of these measures. We reaffirmed the principle that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” in Presidents Biden and Putin’s June 16, 2021 Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability and more recently in the January 3, 2022 Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races. Additionally, the United States released data publicly on the nuclear weapon stockpile at the 2021 session of the UNGA First Committee and every year U.S.

nuclear arsenal modernization plans and nuclear weapons budgets are released to the public. The United States reviewed its nuclear doctrines under a formal Nuclear Posture Review process, in accordance with President Biden's directive to take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons. The NPR underscores the U.S. commitment to reducing the role of nuclear weapons and reestablishing our leadership in arms control. The United States will continue to emphasize strategic stability, seek to avoid costly arms races, and facilitate risk reduction and arms control arrangements where possible. The United States hopes to share further details on the results of this review in the near future. We support a dedicated dialogue on risk reduction among the NPT nuclear-weapon states as decided at the December 2021 Paris P5 Conference. We participate in P5 discussions with NNWS, and bilaterally we have actively sought NNWS perspectives on these issues. The United States has hotlines with both Russia and the PRC. We also maintain a very active National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Center (NNRRC), which processes thousands of notifications annually in multiple languages covering multiple agreements and arrangements. For New START alone, we have had 44 comprehensive data exchanges between the parties, and the NNRRC has processed approximately 24,000 New START notifications since the Treaty's entry into force.

Future of Risk Reduction

- Risk reduction is in all of our interests. The United States will continue to do its part by supporting and engaging in existing risk reduction mechanisms. We will also seek to develop more such measures for use among NWS, and more broadly, with the objectives of enhancing international security, preventing conflict and nuclear weapon use, and paving the way for future nuclear disarmament agreements.
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