

Remarks at the 2015 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference

John Kerry

Secretary of State

United Nations New York City, NY

April 27, 2015

As Delivered

Good afternoon, everybody. Let me start by thanking Ambassador Feroukhi and Director General Amano for their leadership and for the deep commitment to the principles and the goals that are embodied by the NPT.

I want to begin by reading a portion of the message that President Obama has sent for this occasion. He says: “For over 45 years, the NPT has embodied our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons... There are no shortcuts in this endeavor, and each step must be carefully taken to ensure that the security of all is increased along the way. We have not yet achieved the ultimate goals enshrined in the treaty – on this, we all agree – but it is only by seeking common ground and reinforcing shared interests that we will succeed in realizing a world free of nuclear dangers. Over the next few weeks and beyond the time of this conference, let us come together in a spirit of partnership to stop the spread of nuclear weapons.” For succeeding generation – of each succeeding generation – I misread – “advance the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and continue our journey on the path to peace and security.”

[President Obama’s message, in its entirety, follows:

I send greetings to all gathered in New York at the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference.

For over 45 years, the NPT has embodied our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Thanks to collective international efforts and commitment, the NPT is now the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, and those that predicted at the time of the Treaty’s signing that dozens of countries would soon possess nuclear weapons have thankfully been proven wrong.

While the NPT has demonstrated its worth, we know we have more to do. As I said in Berlin in 2013, we may no longer live in fear of global annihilation, but so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe. The United States remains committed to all three pillars of the NPT—disarmament, nonproliferation, and encouragement of peaceful uses of the atom—and we are prepared to go further in meeting our obligations under the Treaty. We continue to lead efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and reduce the role and number of our own, and we are dedicated to global efforts preventing proliferation. There are no shortcuts in this endeavor, and each step must be carefully taken to ensure that the security of all is increased along the way.

We have not yet achieved the ultimate goals enshrined in the Treaty—on this, we all agree—but it is only by seeking common ground and reinforcing shared interests that we

will succeed in realizing a world free of nuclear dangers. Over the next few weeks and beyond the time of this conference, let us come together in a spirit of partnership to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, advance the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and continue our journey on the path to peace and security.]

So, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to stand here today representing a President and an Administration that is committed to the vision of a world without nuclear weapons and to taking the prudent actions that are necessary to one day make that possible.

Now, as most of you know, this summer the world marks 70 years since representatives from dozens of countries came together in San Francisco to sign the United Nations Charter. In doing so, they pledged to save humankind from the scourge of war and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. That pledge and that commitment have become the responsibility of each succeeding generation, and they are at the heart of our deliberations here today, because few things are more threatening to the ideals of the UN and to peace and security on our planet than the spread of nuclear weapons.

When I was a young man, fresh out of college and newly minted in the Navy, I was sent to train at the Nuclear Chemical Biological warfare school. And I learned in graphic detail about what nuclear war would look like, about the damage that weapons of mass destruction can inflict. I learned about throw weights and circles of probable damage. And I learned about radiation – not just the immediate harm, but the long-term trauma that it can cause. And when I considered the huge number of nuclear weapons that we were living with back then – late 1960s – I was left with only one conclusion: This defies all reason.

Thankfully, I was and am today far from alone in that assessment. The vast majority of the world has come to the conclusion – united around the belief that nuclear weapons should one day be eliminated – that as President Obama said in Prague, moral leadership is more powerful than any weapon. And today the race to nuclear arms that once sparked the fear of imminent Armageddon in billions of human beings and hearts, that has been supplanted in a wary but steady march in the direction of reason towards the promise of peace.

Can we really create a future in which nuclear weapons exist only within the pages of history books? The answer is yes. But I know – because I went through the same exercise myself – that based on years of thinking about deterrents and the nature of warfare and the nature of human beings – hard for people to believe that automatically. But when you stop and take into consideration the theories of those who have been involved for years in the national defense of their countries who have come to this conclusion, you realize that it embraces a notion of change in how we resolve conflicts, in how we think, in how we conduct our daily global affairs.

So the answer is yes, but the journey will be a long one. And it will take patience, cooperation, and persistence to complete.

But have no doubt: Every step you take that gets closer to it or that works to get closer to it, in fact, makes our planet safer. And one day when we finally approach the finish line, when we

have conditions that allow us to go from a hundred warheads to zero, we will already be living in a world that is transformed, and transformed for the better.

For the past 45 years, the guiding light on these issues has been the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It's a pretty straightforward arrangement, nothing complicated. Countries without nuclear weapons will not obtain them; countries with nuclear weapons will move towards disarmament; and all countries will have access to peaceful nuclear energy.

But it's critical to remember that each one of those components – nonproliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful use of the atom – is an essential ingredient to the full embodiment of the NPT. The NPT cannot stand unless all three of those pillars are sturdy enough to support it.

And for this treaty to remain upright we need to ensure its words have weight, that its rules are binding, and that its parties are compliant. And that means that the world has to remain united in rejecting the proliferation of nuclear weapons anywhere.

So today there is the potential for historic progress towards that end. The United States and our P5+1 partners have come together with Iran around a series of parameters that, if finalized and implemented, will close off all of Iran's possible pathways to the nuclear material required for a nuclear weapon, and give the international community the confidence that it needs to know that Iran's nuclear program is indeed exclusively peaceful.

I want you to know the hard work is far from over and some key issues remain unresolved. But we are, in fact, closer than ever to the good comprehensive deal that we have been seeking. And if we can get there, the entire world will be safer.

Now it's important to remember that the NPT has always been at the heart of these negotiations. From day one we have been focused on bringing Iran back into compliance with its obligations under the treaty. And if ultimately the talks are successful, it will once again prove the power of diplomacy over conflict and reinforce the rule of law.

Now we have said from the beginning that any deal with Iran will rely not on promises, not on words, but on proof. It will arrive – rely on verification, which is really at the center of the NPT and the entire IAEA process. Obviously verification is at the heart of the NPT, and one of the most important things that we can do to support our nonproliferation goals is to strengthen the IAEA safeguards in order to ensure that the agency has exactly what it needs in order to be able to verify safeguard agreements. That's why the United States is working to bring the Additional Protocol into force globally and to make it the standard, the global standard for safeguards compliance.

Verifying nations' compliance with the NPT is critical, but it's not good enough if we don't also hold parties accountable to their violations. And North Korea is the most glaring example. As we all know, the DPRK continues to ignore its obligations, to undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime, and threaten international security and peace.

So we have to be crystal clear: North Korea must abandon all its nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, return to the IAEA safeguards, and come into full compliance with the duties that it accepted when it first became part of the NPT. The Obama Administration continues to work with its regional allies and partners to set the stage for credible, renewed negotiations, but the onus remains on the DPRK to show that it is actually serious about addressing global concerns. Until that happens, it will only become more isolated from the rest of the world.

My friends, nonproliferation must be non-negotiable. There is no room under the NPT for a country to negotiate its way into becoming a nuclear-armed state. But we are mindful that in return for a commitment to refrain from pursuing nuclear weapons, nations around the world expect the existing nuclear powers to in their turn steadily disarm and fulfil their part of the bargain.

The United States is unequivocally committed to doing just that. We have and we will continue to scale down our arsenal, and to continue to move, step by step, toward nuclear disarmament. And I would say to you that our progress is indisputable. As of September 2014, the number of nuclear weapons in our stockpile has fallen to 4,717, or 85 percent below the Cold War peak. And yes, still way too many. Over the last 20 years alone, we have dismantled 10,251 warheads, with another approximately 2,500 warheads retired and in the queue for elimination. Now, this is complex and costly work, but we are committed to reducing this backlog. And I am pleased to announce today that President Obama has decided that the United States will seek to accelerate the dismantlement of retired nuclear warheads by 20 percent.

Our commitment to disarmament is clear in other areas as well. We have pledged not to pursue new nuclear warheads or support new military missions or military capabilities for the weapons that we do have, and we haven't tested a nuclear weapon in 23 years. We have clearly demonstrated our commitment to abide by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. We have reduced the role that nuclear weapons play in our national security strategy. And the primary purpose today is simply to deter nuclear threats from others. We have reduced the alert status of our nuclear arsenal, and we have taken every reasonable step to ensure its safety, security, and strict control.

But as someone who has spent three decades focused on these issues, I know as well as anyone that we have a long way to go. And I share President Obama's belief that the same countries that ushered in the era of nuclear arms have a special responsibility to guide the world beyond it.

Despite significant reductions, the United States and Russia still possess more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. The New START Treaty – which I am proud to say was ratified when I was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – has put both the United States and Russia on track to reduce our nuclear stockpiles to the lowest levels since the era of Eisenhower and Khrushchev. Implementation is going well and it remains on track, and it will reduce our current stockpile of weapons significantly. But we know that we can cut back even further, and President Obama has made clear our willingness, readiness, now, to engage and negotiate further reductions of deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third below the level set by New START. Let me underscore: That offer remains on the table, and we urge the Russians to take us up on it.

On that note, I want to emphasize our deep concerns regarding Russia's clear violation of its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. We are urging Russia to return to compliance. For decades, that treaty has contributed to the peace and the security in Europe and Asia. And there is no reason – no reason – to create new dangers by undermining it now.

As we build for the future, there are further steps that we can take. It begins with agreement now to start to negotiate a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. It involves initiatives to prepare for future arms control agreements, as we have started to do with a new International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. It also includes legal assurances against the use of nuclear weapons against states that meet their obligations, as allowed under the protocols in regional nuclear-weapons-free zone treaties. And I am pleased to tell you today that the United States submitted the Protocol to the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty to the U.S. Senate for its advice and consent to ratification.

So let me briefly underscore one point here: In 1994, under the Budapest Memorandum, the United States, Russia and the United Kingdom extended similar assurances to Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus as they sent back to Russia the Soviet-era nuclear weapons that remained on their territory. This was an incredible act of leadership for the nonproliferation regime, which is why Russia's current approach to the Budapest Memorandum – disregarding it – is extraordinary.

We also remain firmly committed to holding the proposed conference on a regional zone in the Middle East, free of all weapons of mass destruction. And this zone is a hugely ambitious goal and fraught with challenges, but ambitious goals are always the ones worth pursuing. We support the regional efforts underway to reach agreement on terms for a conference, and those terms must be shared by all – there is no prospect for engagement or agreement absent the consent of the states involved. And this principle needs to be observed and respected if a process is really to start. And if that's the case, I guarantee you the effort will have the full support of the United States.

The third pillar of the NPT is to expand the peaceful uses of the atom. Here, too, the United States is proud to play a strong and supportive role.

The United States is pleased that we are, by far and away, the largest donor to the IAEA. Since the last Review Conference, we have provided close to \$200 million to promote peaceful nuclear applications, and today I'm happy to announce another \$50 million contribution to the agency's Peaceful Uses Initiative. These resources will further expand global access to the peaceful atom, putting it to use for sustainable economic development.

The fact is that nuclear energy can be an incredible resource, with a stunning range of applications.

Through the IAEA's Peaceful Uses Initiative, we are promoting food security by improving the detection of animal diseases in Africa and expanding food safety measures in Latin America. We are advancing human health by advancing early detection capabilities for Ebola in Africa and

strengthening the capacity to detect and treat cancer around the world. And we are protecting the future of our planet by tracing pollution in marine waters, documenting the impacts of climate change, and reducing our climate emissions.

What's important here is that all of this work underscores the fact that our march towards peace is not only marked by the steps that we take to dismantle and to disarm. It's also about the steps that we take to develop, the steps we take to innovate, the steps that we take to build a more peaceful world, where the atom is not used or thought about being used to level cities, but to lift whole communities. That's our destination, and that's where we believe this march will take us.

No one in this chamber thinks that this is going to be easy. We're talking about weapons that have been a hugely important factor in the global system of defense and deterrence for decades, and to eliminate them completely will require a new way of thinking. But we know it's possible to think that way. We know it's possible to act that way. And when major figures in multiple countries have come together to suggest that we can think about this differently, then we need to think about this differently, and we have a clear responsibility to pursue this goal.

It will take intensive diplomacy on all sides – long days, late nights, many years, probably. And there are any number of skeptics who can doubt the international community's ability – let alone our will – to address a challenge of this magnitude.

But I will tell you that the United States is serious. We are committed to working with you to prove the skeptics wrong over time; to work through the challenges facing the NPT; and to carry on the treaty's essential work; and most of all, to leave the race for nuclear arms in the past, and continue instead on a march towards peace and stability and prosperity. Thank you.

