

“Meeting the 21st Century’s Security Challenges Together”
Remarks by Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins
US Under Secretary for State for Arms Control and International Security
Victoria University of Wellington – 8 March 2024

Good morning. I am Bonnie Jenkins, the United States’ Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security at the Department of State. Thank you to the Center for Strategic Studies for hosting this outreach event. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to all of you today to give you a broad overview of what the United States is doing as we face a rapidly changing international security landscape, and the tools we employ to ensure that the United States is leading from a position of innovation during this inflection point in history.

We find ourselves at a time in which we are certainly challenged. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine is about to begin its third year. The PRC continues to pressure Taiwan across the spectrum of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic measures. The Middle East is on a knife’s edge and Russia’s deepening cooperation with Iran and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is cause for concern.

But we are addressing these challenges, to include working to advance the full scope of arms control and nonproliferation measures, in terms of weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms and dual use technology, to strengthen deterrence and strategic stability. Despite challenges posed by strategic competitors, we are addressing how to reduce risks, avoid miscalculation, and close the gap of miscommunication.

The Biden Administration has made clear our commitment to address the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons and to re-establish U.S. credibility as a leader in arms control and avoid costly arms races. A strong nonproliferation regime is a key element in creating a security environment conducive to further progress on disarmament.

We finally completed the destruction of the U.S. chemical weapons stockpile, ensuring that an entire category of declared weapons of mass destruction stockpiles has been eliminated.

We are fully committed to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, including the disarmament provisions in Article VI. The United States

has been a leader on nuclear disarmament and has made enormous strides in reducing the size of our nuclear arsenal.

Since the height of the Cold War, we have reduced 88 percent of our nuclear arsenal from the Cold War peak of 31,255 active and inactive nuclear weapons. At the end of 1968 – the year we signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, that number was 29,561, and in 2020 it was 3,750. In other words, more than seven out of every eight nuclear weapons the United States possessed when we negotiated the NPT have since been retired from the stockpile.

In January 2022, all five NPT nuclear-weapon States came together to affirm that, “a nuclear war cannot be won, and must never be fought.” This principle is even more important today. Though the path to disarmament has rarely been so challenging, we remain committed to that goal.

At the same time, we are continuing our strong support to the international nuclear nonproliferation regime by strengthening nuclear safety, security, and safeguards, especially as we assist nations in partnering in nuclear energy and peaceful nuclear cooperation; building capacity to mitigate proliferation threats; sanctioning actors engaged in concerning proliferation activities; enhancing interdiction measures; and protecting sensitive U.S. technologies from exploitation.

I want to give you some specific examples of some goals we’ve achieved via our nonproliferation efforts.

One year ago, we launched the Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of AI and Autonomy at the Summit on Responsible Military Use of AI in the Military domain in the Hague. In less than one year, a diverse, cross-regional group of 52 nations, including New Zealand, have endorsed the Political Declaration, which offers a foundation for an international dialogue on what “responsible” use of AI in the military domain really means.

We are working with partner governments’ surface vessel and aviation assets to coordinate the Pacific Security Maritime Exchange – or PSMX -- to disrupt UN-prohibited illicit DPRK-related oil transfers. We organized collective PSMX diplomatic actions to expel from a UN Member State’s territorial waters multiple vessels involved in illicitly supplying oil to the DPRK. Our sustained diplomatic efforts have resulted in the continued expansion of PSMX

membership, further strengthening PSMX's operational capabilities and diplomatic reach.

We are also providing expert training to assist maritime security and law enforcement officials of East Asia and Pacific partner countries in establishing port-specific and standardized operating procedures, cross-border communications, multisector information sharing, and regional coordination frameworks to address threats. Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines implemented more effective standard operating procedures and regional coordination frameworks to counter these proliferation threats in the Indo-Pacific maritime environment. Alongside this, we have provided advisory support and training to advance maritime security with Pacific Island nations throughout the region.

And last year we led the Export Control and Human Rights Initiative, a Summit for Democracy deliverable, and co-hosted the first plenary in September 2023. Twenty-six states subscribed to the Initiative's Code of Conduct committing to apply export controls to prevent the proliferation of goods, software, and technologies that may enable serious human rights abuses.

We are sending a clear message: the United States stands with our friends, we stand with democracy, and our commitment to the norms and principles of the UN Charter will not waver. Twenty-first century challenges require 21st century solutions. These solutions are no longer just the traditional mechanisms we have employed in the past. Some have been strengthened while others are adjusted, or new and different. This new security landscape requires innovation and creativity; it requires resilience and modernization. We are clear-eyed about the areas in which our adversaries or competitors are making inroads, and how our actions will determine the safety and security of our future generations.

Thank you.