Second Meeting (online) of the Missile Dialogue Initiative (MDI)

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Distinguished panelists,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you all today. I congratulate the government of Germany and the International Institute for Strategic Studies for their leadership in taking forward international dialogue on missiles. The necessity and timeliness of this initiative is clear.

Key trends and developments

Current trends are driving us to consider how to address the peace and security implications posed by missiles. Let me briefly summarize 5 trends.

First, the legal architecture on missile controls is in a perilous state of decline. Bilateral strategic arms control accomplished far more than merely constraining the capabilities of two States. It also brought stability and predictability for the rest of the international community and promoted a brake on destabilizing arms acquisition in other parts of the world and involving new technologies.

New capabilities have rapidly filled the space left open by the breakdown in treaties. It has been acknowledged officially, so I think it is not controversial to point out that developments such as the demise of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty have motivated some States to develop various advanced missile technologies, including multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles, maneuverable re-entry vehicles, decoys, jamming devices, advanced cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons.

Second, the demand for new norms is facing headwinds at the multilateral level. There is a breakdown in consensus over the historical objective of eliminating means of delivery as part of the nuclear disarmament process.

Although the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has consolidated a number of the strongest norms against nuclear weapons, it is notable that it does not address eliminating their means of delivery, even as an aspiration as was the case with the NPT. It also remains to be seen how this issue will be addressed in connection with efforts to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Third, a number of missile-producing and exporting States are not members of any international missile control regime or arrangement. This is especially the case in the context
of Asia. It is vital that we effectively engage all missile producing and exporting States. An initiative such as this one, framed in terms of dialogue, provides the best example of a useful approach and I hope it serves to deepen engagement among all relevant stakeholders.

Fourth, there is active development and acquisition of missiles of all types and categories. More States in Asia than in any other region have deployed or flight-tested ballistic missiles capable of reaching intercontinental ranges. The increasing interest in hypersonic weapons may create new demand for medium and intermediate-range missiles. Shorter-range ballistic missiles continue to be actively acquired both as nuclear-weapon delivery systems and as conventionally armed strike weapons.

Fifth, technological developments and recent events demonstrate that missiles are no longer just an issue of strategic security but are also connected with international stability and the protection of civilians. For example, improvements in guidance have resulted in the proliferation and use of ballistic missiles as battlefield weapons, including by non-state actors. The development of longer-range artillery rockets has blurred the distinction between such systems and ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear weapon. In recent years, we have also witnessed tragic incidents resulting in the destruction of civilian airliners and large-scale loss of life.

**Principles for addressing missiles in the framework of the United Nations**

What would a modernized approach to missiles within the United Nations look like? Since the most serious discussions on these issues have taken place in either bilateral or plurilateral settings, it is important to understand what principles would underlie a multilateral approach within the framework of the United Nations.

Foremost, security discourse within the framework of the United Nations often comes down to several basic principles. These underlie the design of most arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation instruments. They include the principles of non-discrimination, equal rights and obligations for the participation of all States and undiminished security for all.

In this connection, the narrative matters. Approaches centered on export controls are most effective when they are situated in the context of broader efforts for disarmament and arms control. This means foremost avoiding any perception of preventing the dissemination of technology for peaceful purposes or in freezing existing asymmetries in the ability of States
to acquire means of self-defense. Our objectives must demonstrably be part of a solution that advances the common security of all.

A single comprehensive agreement on missiles may be too challenging. A 2006 report of the Secretary-General issued following the inability of the second Intergovernmental Panel on Missiles to agree on a report, concluded that achieving consensus on all aspects of the issue of missiles in a single step would be impossible. This is a sobering assessment, but one that I think remains worth reflecting on as we think about how to design future approaches.

**Pathways for modernizing approaches to missile controls**

I would like to describe several possible independent pathways for modernizing approaches to missile controls.

One - We need to sustain progressive momentum toward the elimination of strategic delivery systems. This should involve steady progress toward the multilateralization of strategic arms control. While those with the largest arsenals have a responsibility to lead and continue reductions, more States need to be brought into the process.

Dialogue is also needed on strategic anti-missile systems as part of the nuclear disarmament process. In the meantime, there continues to be risk reductions steps that could be taken, including the de-alerting of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles. At the global level, States should consider the potential for freezing the current international situation with respect to limits on the range of conventionally armed ballistic missiles.

Two - We need to check destabilizing new technologies. There should be greater transparency on the nature of hypersonic glide vehicles in light of their potential to be used with either conventional or nuclear payloads and lack of clarity about associated doctrines. I hope new efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space and to promote norms of responsible behavior, address the threat of terrestrial-based anti-satellite missiles. Such threats might point to another need to consider dialogue on strategic anti-missile systems. In other words, overview and linkages across specific systems are important.

Three - We need to promote greater transparency and the mainstreaming of norms to all weapons with the potential to harm civilians. Most surface-to-air systems remain outside even voluntary transparency mechanisms, such as the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. As these systems become more widely available, including possibly to
non-state armed groups, the time has come to consider whether they should be brought into the same frameworks for transparency and accountability that apply to most other types of heavy conventional weapons. Such a step can also help to encourage users of those systems to take all necessary precautions to ensure the protection of civilians, in accordance with their international humanitarian and human rights obligations.

Four - We need to work on a common lexicon for missiles. The lack of universally agreed definitions and common understanding of key characteristics can complicate efforts for arms control and the maintenance of international peace and security. We have witnessed disputes in United Nations bodies over terms such as “artillery rockets”, “ballistic missile technology” and missiles “designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons”. A more granular understanding of the characteristics of cruise missiles might also be helpful. A governmental expert group would be well-suited for such tasks.

Finally, we need to explore the potential of regional approaches. All five treaties that establish nuclear-weapon-free zones specify that means of delivery are not included in the scope of the term nuclear weapon or nuclear explosive device. However, missiles are also not otherwise addressed in any of those treaties. It is notable that with only about half a dozen exceptions, the parties to those treaties do not possess ballistic missiles considered to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. There is also significant overlap in membership of nuclear-weapon-free zones and various agreements limiting dual use of technologies such as the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Hague Code of Conduct. While neither can substitute for a universal legally binding arrangement, there is unexplored potential for such countries to find new ways to be norm leaders in this area. Missile controls should also be considered in the context of future regional security and disarmament arrangements.

Missile controls played a crucial role in conflict prevention, risk mitigation, de-escalation and tension reduction at the height of the Cold War. Preventing the spread and emergence of new types of destabilizing weapons remains a vital unfinished task for the international community. I hope that this initiative is the first step toward formal attempts to address this situation in a way that brings security benefits for all. In fact, your work in this process will make important contributions to the future crafting of a new vision and approaches to arms control and disarmament – something that an increasing number of leaders and experts seem to believe the world must have.

I thank you very much and I look forward to our discussion.