



**Wilton Park virtual meeting: A conceptual and analytical dialogue on  
policy options for multilateral controls on ballistic missiles**

**Opening keynote address by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu  
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

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Virtual Meeting  
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Dear Mark Smith,

Ms. Samantha Job,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be able to join you today for this timely discussion. In recent years, we have seen increasing interest in seeking renewed multilateral approaches to missiles.

***Why talk about missiles?***

The issue of missiles has been important for United Nations disarmament and arms control efforts for several reasons.

The first is the long and inextricable connection between eliminating nuclear weapons and their means of delivery. It is no coincidence that the first proposal at the United Nations for addressing missiles in the context of disarmament came within a year of the deployments of the first intercontinental ballistic missiles.

This connection is enshrined in the preamble of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It therefore follows that our efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons also require engagement on their means of delivery. This is something that has been very much missing from the discourse within the NPT review process.

Second, more than most other weapon platforms, missiles continue to have a significant impact on international stability. This is due to their inherent properties. Short flight times makes them dangerous in a crisis. These dangers are compounded by their dual-use nature. Unlike other common means for delivering weapons of mass destruction, missile technologies are inexpensive, less difficult to master and already widely proliferated. Missile technologies also have civil applications in the form of space launch programmes.

Third, multilateral norms relating to missiles are not comprehensive, universally applied or well developed. Now defunct limitations and restrictions on missiles defenses and intermediate and longer-range missiles only ever applied to two States. Nonetheless, these measures could have tremendous benefit if they were discussed and applied on broader basis.

Heavy surface-to-air missile systems, which have led to the tragic loss of civilian lives in recent years, remain outside of existing United Nations instruments, including the Arms Trade Treaty and the Register of Conventional Arms.

Existing export control regimes and voluntary arrangements are not universally accepted, and they have struggled to keep pace with emerging technologies, such as hypersonic weapons.

### ***Trends and developments***

Recent trends have made the need to revive multilateral discussions on missiles more urgent. Let me just touch on briefly on three issues.

First, the erosion of arms control architectures has left a legal lacuna that is quickly being filled by new weapons and concepts. The demise of important treaties has 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. Such developments can complicate future arms control and risk stimulating proliferation by an ever-widening number of actors.

Second, advances in technology are enabling expanded battlefield roles for missiles. For example, improvements in guidance technologies have increasingly enabled all types of systems up to medium-range ballistic missiles to be used to carry out precision strikes, even by non-state actors. And every year, we see more actors acquire and use missiles of all types, including to deliberately target and attack civilian objects.

Third, developments in missile technologies are challenging common thresholds for non-proliferation measures and the relevance of existing taxonomies. In particular, the Security Council has struggled in responding to launches of systems that blur the line between longer-range artillery rockets and ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear weapon. The increasing development of maneuverable warheads and hypersonic weapons also compel us to think beyond missiles that strictly follow a ballistic path.

### ***Starting points for multilateral discussions***

It is clear, therefore, that new thinking and novel approaches will be needed to confront these dynamics. I am confident that this meeting and its breakout groups will go into far greater depth on both the nature of the challenges and on the possible solutions. But in conclusion, I wish to make three general suggestions on what multilateral approaches are especially salient from the perspective of the United Nations.

First, as a starting point for engagement, we should seek 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. The evolving nature of missile technologies and threats should also prompt consideration as to whether it is useful to focus so exclusively on ballistic missiles. A governmental expert group would be well-suited for such tasks.

Second, Measures designed to increase transparency and mutual confidence are a proven tool in the arms control. They have played import roles in conflict prevention, risk mitigation, de-escalation and tension reduction, and functioned as a step for more ambitious measures. In the specific context of missiles, a starting point could involve taking stock of all existing international measures and seeking greater adherence to them and their possible further elaboration.

Finally, we need to encourage dialogue at the regional level on issues related to missiles, including in connection with nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties. While no existing zones directly address means of delivery, only about half a dozen parties to those treaties possess ballistic missiles considered to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. There could thus be benefit in encouraging discussion of this issue within existing zones as a means for promoting greater mutual confidence and strengthening norms. Missile controls should also be considered in the context of future regional security and disarmament arrangements.

I hope this overview has provided some food for thought and I look forward to the outcomes of the discussions over the next two days.

Thank you very much for your attention.