Mr. Chairman, thank you for your good chairmanship of this important meeting.

I would like to offer a means of looking at the task of achieving and maintaining a nuclear weapons free world that could make our work more efficient and effective. As we are discussing risk during this session, I will refer to how risk can be evaluated in the process of fulfilling this task.

The task of achieving and maintaining a NWFW would seem to consist of two parts, namely: “achieving and maintaining.” But I want to propose that “achieving” be broken down into two distinct parts, A and B to follow, so that we have actually three distinct parts:

A. Minimizing aspects of nuclear deterrence that hinder progress on B an C;
B. Orchestrating the final act of elimination of all nuclear-weapons and special materials; and
C. Getting ready to live in a NWFW, including establishing the institutions needed to maintain it.

This ‘trichotomy’ is based on the premise that there is no ‘smooth’ transition from deterrence to a NWFW, i.e. no glide path from many nuclear weapons to zero. Nuclear deterrence in one form or another will prevail until it is ‘shut down.’ And when that occurs the world needs to be already prepared for carrying on in the absence of nuclear weapons. This means that work on life in a (C.) NWFW should begin now. And since (B.) the final act of elimination will not be easy to orchestrate, this too should receive attention starting now.

So if we are serious about our share objective -- and ‘good faith’ assures that we are! -- we must evaluate adjustments to nuclear deterrence first and foremost in light of how said adjustments would facilitate the tasks of orchestrating shutting it down and of establishing the needed NWFW institutions. In what follows, I will comment on measures that are often assumed to be an essential part of nuclear disarmament, but which may actually be primarily about adjustment to nuclear deterrence that are only rather indirectly related to achievement and maintenance of a NWFW.

Consider “reductions.” Reductions are needed to get us to the preferred number for the final act of elimination. What if the final act of elimination could be designed, i.e. orchestrated, to simultaneously eliminate 10,000 weapons in a single go? (Note that, for the sake of argument, I have picked an obviously much too high number.) In this case, efforts directed at reductions below 10,000 weapons would become, from the perspective of achieving and maintaining a NWFW, superfluous. Such reductions may well be a sensible thing in their own right, but they would not be central or essential to the main goal. (Keep in mind that unless reductions go below 100 in total, the catastrophic climate disruption they could cause is not significantly mitigated.)

Consider “transparency”. As long as we have confidence in the figures relating to the final disposition of nuclear weapons and special materials, how vital is it that we have precise data prior to that time? It would seem that the most important thing is that activities relating to transparency help to build the needed confidence for the final act of elimination. Extra information may be of interest to historians and analysts, but it needn’t become a bone of contention among those pursuing the establishment of the NWFW.

Consider “de-alerting.” If the final act of elimination could be designed to take weapons from an alert-state directly to disablement and dismantlement, then de-alerting, whatever merit it may have in its own right, would not be an essential element of reaching our goal. In this case, it seems pretty clear to this lay-person that elimination would most likely be much harder to orchestrate with weapons still on alert. But note: that from this perspective, de-alerting’s value come from the fact that it facilitates the final act of elimination – its contribution as a global safety measure is a good ‘side effect’. The urgency that we attach to de-alerting is motivated by the latter effect – otherwise de-alerting could be left until just before the final shutdown. (Of course, if the world commits nuclear suicide because of a falsely triggered launch on warning, that would certainly foil achievement of the desired goal!)

Consider “non-use.” Does a first-use or retaliatory policy stand in the way of preparations for living in a NWFW? Not in any fundamental way. But if preparations to live in a nuclear weapons free world are proceeding apace, it is hard to see why any
country would need or want to continue threatening first-use to keep others, threatening conventional attack, at bay. Thus progressing on this front encourages states to take the task of preparing to live in a NWFW seriously.

Finally, consider “modernization.” On the face of it, who cares whether, in the final act of elimination, the bomb are rusty and old or new and shiny? As long as the nuclear armed states are prepared to cancel their acquisition program contracts in time for the final act of elimination, modernization is an obstacle to our goal only if it significantly complicates elimination. (Although, psychologists do warn that the more deeply invested we are in something, the harder we find it to change course.)

Preparing for the final shutdown and preparing to live in a nuclear weapon free world, will not be cost free. When hundreds of billions of dollars are pumped into modernization and perpetuating deterrence, is it unreasonable to demand that comparable sums be put into creating the institutions for a NWFW and orchestrating the final act of elimination? Even one hundredth the sum would make a world of difference. While there are a few initiatives regarding monitoring and verification, these need to be vastly expanded. The IAEA’s budget to address these challenges could use an immediate infusion of funds.

In summary, quite a few of the measures under discussion are NOT essential to the main objective. I think it fair to say that the nuclear weapon states and alliances genuinely hope to avoid nuclear war and nuclear accidents; and let’s grant that they have done a (just barely) passable job of managing nuclear deterrence so far. That said, they should be open to suggestions for improvement from whomever may be making them. But let’s not lose sight that such proposals are primarily about ‘fine-tuning’ deterrence rather than achieving and maintaining a NWFW.

Some proposals contribute indirectly to our main objective by making it more likely that our efforts to make progress will not be vitiated by nuclear catastrophe. But it seems to me that they should be accorded lesser priority in this forum as compared to the three main tasks: maneuvering deterrence to the point where it can be readily and verifiably shut down; preparing that shut-down operation; and preparing for life in a world without nuclear deterrence which is capable of keeping it that way.

So, from this perspective, let’s now look at risk. Nuclear deterrence (in contradistinction to everyday deterrence) rests upon threatening wildly exaggerated retribution. This has imposed upon the world as a whole a level of insecurity unique in human history -- a level so high that we can hardly comprehend it and are only too happy to push it back into the deepest recesses of our minds. Even those of us here, who are assigned to deal with this issue, try, for the sake of our sanity, to minimize how much we dwell on its truly murderous dimensions. It is against this strangely, unspoken, invisible background that we then ask whether nuclear weapon undermine or enhance our relative security vis a vis another state. Most states have decided it’s a bad choice even though other states brandish nuclear arms; but many other states have bought into nuclear deterrence, in large part because other states brandish nuclear arms. Of these some go further and say. “Well, since we have these things, what other ‘benefit’ can we derive from them?” And they imagine them deterring conventional threats as well a nuclear threats.

It is this ‘after-thought’ role of nuclear weapons that has drawn states into a state of unpreparedness to live in a NWFW. Every state – and alliance – that is not ‘ready’ to switch to a NWFW should be challenged to develop a multifaceted plan for how it will look after its security in a NWFW. It should honestly work out how long it will take to get its act together. And it should mobilize the resources to take on this task in a determined manner. And then, of course, they should get busy implementing the plan so that they are not the country or alliance holding up the switch to a NWFW. (Or find themselves in a NWFW, unprepared.)

Note that even if the degree of relative security vis a vis this or that country may change unfavorable, the overwhelmingly positive benefit of having the global nuclear threat lifted should be factored into every country’s overall security status. Living in a NWFW will greatly enhance each and every state’s security.

Note also that I used the word, “multifaceted.” Preparedness is not even primarily a military challenge, it is also constructive foreign relations; fuller use of UN mechanism for conflict resolution; and addressing other global problem in a cooperative manner. Much as non-nuclear weapons states outside nuclear alliance have long done. The great switch to a NWFW will reinforce our confidence and capacity to live together in security. We will look back on the Nuclear Arms Era as the most dangerous episode in human history and wonder how we could have ever uttered the two words “nuclear” and “security” in the same breath!

Thank you.