

Ambassador Thomas Greminger's contribution to the panel on Nuclear Factor in Crisis Management: How to Reduce Risks

Primakov Readings in Moscow

**Remarks by
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Colleagues, it is a pleasure to take part in this event.

- This meeting is called “World Order in Transit”. The last four major transitions in world order took place after major wars: in 1815, 1919, 1945, and after the Cold War.
- The current war in Ukraine will have a decisive impact on our future world order. And the longer it lasts, the more severe will be the Cold War 2.0 that we are already facing.
- However, what is different from past inflexion points in history is that we face the risk of nuclear conflict.
- Yet we are not in **uncharted waters**. Almost exactly 60 years ago, it was possible for the superpowers to move back from the brink of nuclear confrontation during the Caribbean Missile Crisis. A few weeks ago, at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, we hosted an event involving American and Russian security experts to discuss lessons learned from that dangerous time and how they can be applied today.
- On the basis of that meeting and my own personal reflections, I would like to contribute some ideas to this discussion. I will make five brief points:
 1. First, can Russia and the West – particularly the United States – even talk about arms control at the moment? You have probably heard the argument that there can be “no business as usual” or that it is impossible to compartmentalize issues in the current security environment.
 - But when the stakes are **mutually assured destruction, keeping open channels of communication** is not doing a favour or making a concession to the other side: it is simply realpolitik.
 - Precisely because the situation is so dangerous, the United States, Russia and other nuclear powers need to be talking to each other – not least to prevent incidents or accidents and to reduce and manage risks.
 - Therefore, in order to prevent “no business as usual” from becoming “no business at all”, issues as important as the strategic stability agenda need to be compartmentalized.
 - This also applies to **transnational risks and threats** like terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime or the nexus between climate change and security as well as difficult geographies such as Afghanistan, Syria, the Korean Peninsula, or Iran.
 - So, even as long as there are no negotiations on the war in Ukraine in sight, discussion on these important security matters should be pursued.
 2. Second, we need to **break the cycle of escalation**. Some may advocate a policy of “escalate to de-escalate”. There is also loose talk about using **tactical nuclear weapons**. But nuclear brinkmanship carries **existential risks**. Things can quickly spiral out of control in a way that takes us to the point of no return.

- Consequently, instead of a tit-for-tat game of chicken that could destroy us all, I would argue for a policy of **reciprocal restraint**: small, reciprocated steps that could lead to de-escalation.
 - More generally, unlike in the 1970s, there is little support for détente. The keyword today and in the near future is deterrence. But I hope this can be **combined** with the word restraint.
 - In this sense, I welcome the statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 2 November unilaterally reaffirming the P5 statement of 3 January 2022, whereby “a nuclear war is unacceptable; it cannot be won and should not be fought.”
 - Encouraging as well are the recent high-level contacts between Russian and US officials in Ankara, providing evidence that nuclear issues are taken seriously by great powers.
3. Third, the **de-escalation process needs to become more structured**. On what basis?
- A number of good ideas were on the table at the Strategic Stability Dialogue in Geneva last year.
 - In this sense, I was very pleased to welcome Deputy Minister Ryabkov as well as the Head of the US Delegation in the margins of these dialogue rounds at the GCSP.
 - And it is worth revisiting the wide range of concrete proposals laid out in the response of the United States and NATO to the Russian treaty proposals on 26 January 2022. I found them very substantive and would have been a happy man as OSCE’s SG to have only a portion of it on the negotiation table during my time as SG.
 - Why was this offer not taken up? Was it too late? Were the drums of war already beating too loudly?
4. Fourth, at a minimum, we need to **preserve and use what we have**. The safety net of so many arms control treaties has been cut away in recent years (such as the CFE, INF and Open Skies Treaties). Therefore, it is vital to use existing CSBMs like the Vienna Document and to launch negotiations on the post-New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.
- In terms of **process design**, I think lessons can be learned from the 1980s. At the time, bilateral talks between the Soviet Union and the United States were complimented by multilateral talks on arms control, disarmament and CSBMs.
 - However, a challenge will be how to factor in China: can nuclear issues related to European security be discussed in isolation of other geopolitical considerations? And if not, what would the negotiating framework of a wider nuclear non-proliferation agreement look like?
5. Fifth, we need to consider the impact of **artificial intelligence and cyber threats** on nuclear security. We have seen increasingly sophisticated attacks on infrastructure. All sides have an interest to avoid the potential risks of disruptive technologies in a nuclear age.

- My summary and this is more of an observation than a suggestion.
- We are closer to nuclear war than at any time in the past 60 years.
- **There needs to be a sense of urgency!** And for this reason, it is important to maintain platforms of dialogue in a deeply polarized environment with little trust at all.
- We must keep talking on formal and informal levels to avoid misperceptions and miscalculations.
- After all, crisis management on nuclear issues is paramount. It goes beyond European security – it affects the future of our planet and our survival as a species. Therefore, it should be the highest priority.