

Eröffnungsrede von Staatssekretär Dr. Géza Andreas von Geyr „20. NATO-Konferenz über Massenvernichtungswaffen, Rüstungskontrolle, Abrüstung und Nichtverbreitung“ (in englischer Sprache)

5.3.2026 - Géza Andreas von Geyr | Auswärtiges Amt

It is my privilege to welcome you here this morning in the Foreign Ministry to this NATO WMD Conference. I am especially glad that I can do this opening, as I was Permanent Representative at NATO until a year ago.

As we meet today, we meet at a historic moment for the security of the European continent. It is day four of a heavy war in the Middle East and the Gulf, and it is day 1468 of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

It is for the first time since decades that such substantial wars are going on right at our Eastern and Southern borders. This makes our security in Europe now our very top priority and main concern.

In my following few remarks, I would like to link this to the topic of the conference.

For my first remark, I would like to start with the situation in the Middle East. It is particularly relevant to you and your line of work: non-proliferation and the fight against weapons of mass destruction.

Let us not forget: At the origin of this conflict, which has been smoldering for more than 20 years, lie Iran's nuclear ambitions, in other words: nuclear proliferation.

We tried over decades to solve this conflict through diplomacy. In addition, we have adopted extensive sanctions in response to Iran's threat to the region and to European and international security through its ballistic missile program, its support for armed groups in the Middle East against Israel and others as well as the regimes brutal repression and human rights violations.

We witnessed at the beginning of this year. Ultimately, Iran chose to expand its nuclear activities aggravating the threat to international peace and security. Iran has never removed the grave concerns about its nuclear program, which lacked any civilian plausibility.

Our aim was and remains very clear: Iran must never seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons. And this is in fact the only possible outcome under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). I am sure that now there will be much less of a danger of a nuclear weapon in the hands of Iran.

We have all followed the developments in the Middle East over the last few days and we condemn the indiscriminate and disproportionate missile attacks launched by Iran against countries in the region. This happens as we speak – those countries have our full solidarity!

And obviously, with Cyprus, an EU Member State has been attacked by a drone. This shows how close this conflict has already come to Europe.

My second remark is on Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. As the world is focusing so much on the Middle East, for me, especially today, it is important to be very clear: we are affirming our unwavering support for Ukraine. In defending its territory, integrity and its right to exist, its freedom, sovereignty and independence.

We will continue to give you maximum support and put maximum pressure on Russia!

My third remark now is on priorities. These times demand clear priorities: In Europe, we must give clear priority to the security of our continent. When the new German Government started, it has put forward three clear goals that we see as crucial for our country: Security, Freedom and Prosperity are our key interests, and I consider them to be the key priorities for our continent as well. They belong together: without security, there is no freedom and prosperity; and without freedom, there is no security.

Among these three goals, security now comes first. It is the foundation that enables and protects our freedom and prosperity. For our values do not defend themselves — they must be defended.

Russia's war against Ukraine demonstrates what we have to defend ourselves against. And so does the war in the Middle East, right at the border of our NATO ally Türkiye.

When it comes to the security of Europe, our first priority is to strengthen our deterrence and defense. We need to protect our population, our security, our freedom. What we want to secure are: our way of life, our open societies, the rule of law and our democratic values.

We do this first of all with NATO, and even more so by strengthening Europe and the Europeans within NATO. For my country, this means that not only is the German government committed to the 5% goal. We are reforming military service and investing heavily in conventional capabilities in air defense, deep precision strikes and satellite technology.

For our security, NATO remains without any doubt number one! Deterrence has become for us Europeans an existential goal again. When we strengthen our defense, we are not preparing for conflict; we are working to prevent it.

Yesterday you heard the speech given by French president Macron and the joint statement given by President Macron and German chancellor Merz. Yes, France and Germany have decided to enter closer cooperation in the field of deterrence. I want to be very clear: this is meant in addition to NATO's nuclear deterrence and NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements, to which my country will absolutely continue contributing. And of course, France and Germany will continue to comply fully with the NPT.

My fourth remark is on the question: what will this focus on strengthening deterrence mean for our approach to arms control? We must be realistic. The era of treaty-based arms control is more or less over, for now. New START was left without a follow-on agreement.

To reflect the new reality of the strategic landscape, China would need to be included.

China possesses the world's third-largest nuclear force, and it is rapidly expanding. With growing capability comes growing responsibility — in arms control, transparency and risk reduction. The onus is increasingly on China. This is one of the main topics we talk about with China — we have to. US allegations regarding a possible nuclear test by China in 2020 underscore a crucial point: nuclear testing must not be resumed.

The NPT has been and continues to be the bedrock of international security. The current situation is

underscoring the necessity to even invest more into preserving the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It is one of the most universal and most successful international treaties benefitting us all, wherever we live in this world.

Foreign Minister Waidepohl is planning to attend the NPT Review Conference where he will highlight our German commitment to the NPT. Among our priorities will be risk reduction and transparency to help avoid inadvertent nuclear escalation, let alone nuclear war.

In arms control, we can neither pretend the old world still exists. Nor must we surrender to cynicism. What served our security well for decades must not be thoughtlessly thrown overboard. But we must focus on evaluating arms control against a clear benchmark of its contribution to our security and those of our allies and partners. In doing so, we should also look not only at the risks, but opportunities of new technologies, especially for verification in a world without binding treaties.

Dear friends, as we live in extraordinarily demanding and dangerous times, this conference comes at the right time. It is good to have you all here!

Let us now turn to listen to the speech of NATO Secretary General Rutte. Thank you!

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