

Testimony of Adam M. Scheinman
Nominee for Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation,
with Rank of Ambassador
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee for Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me. I am also very pleased to be here today with my fellow nominees.

Mr. Chairman, this is my second time being nominated for this position. The first time capped more than two decades in the federal civil service dedicated to preventing nuclear weapons proliferation and related nuclear risks. More recently, I served on the faculty of the National War College, which was a welcome break from the day-to-day rhythms of government work but also an opportunity to step back and view nuclear matters through a wider lens.

At the war college, we teach that major U.S. national security challenges are best met using all instruments of power – diplomatic, military, economic and informational – and in partnership with friends, allies, and on occasion our competitors. A perfect illustration is nuclear proliferation, a challenge to our vital interests and for which there are no purely military or political solutions.

There can be no doubt that the international system is in transition, increasingly competitive and less predictable. In a time of such turbulence, some ask whether the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – or NPT, an agreement conceived in the Cold War era – is “fit for purpose.”

To my mind, this question answers itself resoundingly in the affirmative. There is no realistic nuclear weapons challenge facing the United States for which the NPT limits our strategic options or for which better options would be available in the treaty's absence. To the contrary, the NPT is a force multiplier, extending the range and reach of U.S. nuclear diplomacy and global confidence in nonproliferation norms, rules and supporting institutions. This explains the continuity of U.S. bipartisan support for this treaty, support that spans twelve presidencies, from President Kennedy to President Biden – that's six Democratic and six Republican administrations.

As in prior decades, we recognize today that nuclear proliferation dangers are best tackled not alone but through collective action. The NPT anchors such action. It is the basis for assembling diplomatic coalitions to confront Iran and North Korea. It is why robust international nuclear safeguards came into being and continue to strengthen. It provides a framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation and restraint on transfers of sensitive nuclear technologies. And it permeates U.S. alliances that are themselves potent instruments of nonproliferation policy.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the NPT is not immune to pressures that over time may erode its appeal. Regional grievances and rising frustration of many parties over the slow pace of nuclear disarmament actions are serious problems that roil the NPT's political process. And one needs little imagination to guess at the consequences for the treaty and international security if Iran were to take the path of North Korea by seeking to withdraw from the treaty to develop nuclear weapons.

If confirmed, I look forward to doing my part to advance a broad U.S. strategy to strengthen the NPT in all its aspects. There is much work to do, from strengthening international safeguards, to expanding peaceful nuclear cooperation without adding to proliferation dangers, to enhancing the security incentives of states to support the NPT. Reassuring allies that rely on the United States for defense and deterrence is one such measure. Another is reviving the nuclear arms control enterprise, as the Biden Administration has advanced by reaching agreement with Russia on a five-year extension of the New START Treaty. The agreement to resume a high-level dialogue on strategic stability is another welcome development, one that can lay the groundwork for additional measures.

Most significantly, our NPT agenda requires steady U.S. leadership. We were present at the creation of the nonproliferation regime and no other state has our reach or influence to sustain it. If confirmed, I pledge to do my part to carry forward the legacy of U.S. leadership, working closely with Congress, my interagency colleagues, and our foreign partners to preserve and strengthen a treaty system that contributes so much to the nation's security.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I welcome any questions you or other members of the Committee may have.