

**Speech by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Ann Linde at the conference  
Rethinking Arms Control, Capturing Technology, 6 November 2020**

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Thank you, Foreign Minister Maas, for providing this much-needed platform for discussing the implications of emerging technologies on global security and arms control. I am very happy to have this opportunity to consider these important issues together with all of you, and to learn from the remarkable number of experts from various backgrounds taking part in this event.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Technological developments – in AI, missile technology, cyber, outer space and biotechnology just to mention some – have great implications for the future of warfare and the development of military capabilities. Technology's impact on inter-state relations is now more noticeable than in previous eras, and will continue to be so. This is due to three interconnected trends: 1) rapid technological developments, 2) digital infrastructure having become a crucial strategic resource, and 3) increased great power competition with foreign, security, and defence policy implications, that in turn affect trade, arms control and international law.

All consequences of these extremely rapid developments are not yet recognized, nor fully understood. If we do not keep up, however, the risks are clear: the use of novel weapons systems with unknown and far-reaching consequences, dangerous and costly arms races, increased instability and sensitive technologies falling into the wrong hands, to name a few.

In the nuclear domain, hypersonic weapons and developments in cyber add to an already dangerous trajectory, including in relation to close calls and misunderstandings. The stakes are appallingly high, as any mistake would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences and could be gravely destabilising.

In biotechnology, the lack of transparency in some biodefence programmes, non-state actors' interest in dangerous infectious agents and the wide availability of do-it-yourself genetics are all reasons for concern.

In outer space, our rapidly growing use and dependence on space systems create new vulnerabilities, while threats and risks are increasing due to factors like the development and testing of anti-satellite weapons and lack of transparency.

The area of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) is no exception to the need to find effective solutions that prevent unwanted consequences. International Humanitarian Law continues to apply fully to all weapon systems and human control over the use of force must always be upheld. The CCW is the appropriate forum to find consensus around the central elements of LAWS.

In parallel with technological developments, the political context is also increasingly challenging. Growing tensions and a severe lack of trust between military and nuclear powers contribute to a dangerously unpredictable security context. The arms control architecture that has served us well for decades is gradually unravelling, in some cases having already led to the abandonment or systematic obstruction of milestone treaties. This is part of multilateral solutions and institutions being increasingly challenged.

Some may say that the prospects for arms control and multilateralism right now are too bleak, but I would firmly argue the opposite. The challenge of accommodating technical developments and navigating political complexities is not new – it is the essence of arms control. Indeed, arms control and multilateralism are needed now more than ever. Through the years, responsible arms control, often dependent of political will at the highest level, has made invaluable contributions to international security. We must recognize these gains and re-establish its status.

For Sweden, these are key foreign policy priorities. It is also a point of departure of the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament gathering 16 Non-Nuclear Weapon States, including some present here. The aim is to unlock nuclear disarmament diplomacy and find common ground by applying a ‘stepping stones’ approach that could lead to further progress. Among the proposed measures are matters related to emerging and disruptive technologies. In addition, the Swedish Government has decided to establish an academic knowledge centre on nuclear disarmament, to further promote education and research in this field.

I would like to **highlight a few elements** that we consider important in the process of rethinking arms control:

**First**, we need to further deepen our understanding of new technologies and how they affect peace and security, so that we can identify how to best address them from an arms control perspective. This conversation needs to include a multitude of stakeholders, including civil society, industry and academia. Women must have equal opportunities to participate in these discussions, and a gender equality perspective is essential.

**Second**, we need to keep defending multilateralism and the rules-based international order. Existing arms control arrangements must be safeguarded and strengthened, and where appropriate developed to accommodate technological advances in their respective fields. In this context, we call on the US and Russia to promptly agree on an extension of New START. Recent talks between the parties can hopefully lead to concrete results. Chinese participation in the process ahead, as well as the inclusion of non-strategic nuclear weapons, would be welcome.

**Third**, international law, including International Humanitarian Law (IHL), fully applies to existing and emerging weapons systems. States remain responsible and accountable for their development, deployment and use in armed conflict. It is necessary to ensure that also emerging weapons systems with increasingly autonomous functions are used in conformity with international law, in particular IHL.

Human responsibility for decisions on the use of weapons systems must be retained and human control over the use of force always be upheld. Accountability cannot be transferred to machines. The international community should continue its work towards concrete results in relation to normative and operational frameworks. Legal reviews of proposed new weapons are of particular importance.

**Fourth**, we must not forget to make use of the possibilities for arms control that come with new technologies, not least in verification. Robust verification is key for successful arms control arrangements, by ensuring compliance and increasing trust between states. Developments in data gathering and processing open up new opportunities for verification and transparency. The increasing diversification of sources, with more actors providing different types of sensors, enables better corroboration of evidence. All states, Nuclear Weapons States and Non-Nuclear Weapon States alike, have important roles to play.

**Fifth**, arms control must be fit for purpose, capable of encompassing the actors and systems most relevant for the current security context. As it becomes increasingly difficult to compare, quantify and regulate emerging technologies and capabilities, we might need to shift focus and think more about behavioural restrictions. At the same time, we would be doing ourselves a disservice by making the perfect enemy of the good. We should not shy away from making the deals that we can make right now, even if it leaves some matters undecided, since more limited agreements could lay the ground for more substantial arrangements.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to say a few words on **Europe's role** in all of this.

New technologies are already having important effects on the character of war and warfare. This will continue, with a considerable impact on all of us, not least Europe. We should contribute to mitigating the risks and promote the controlled and responsible use of new technologies for military capabilities. As far as possible, this should be done together with our transatlantic partners.

Already today, European political and financial support is crucial for upholding multilateral arms control arrangements and verification mechanisms. As a defender of multilateralism and the rules based international order, the EU has a key role to play in developing arms control solutions and promoting responsible behavior in relation to emerging technologies. Leadership is needed going forward – the EU should have a proactive approach. This meeting is an important step in that direction.

Our work within the EU on cyber issues is a case in point. The EU cyber diplomacy toolbox has been instrumental in improving our shared situational awareness and our ability to act together to counter antagonistic cyber threats. On several occasions, the measures in the toolbox – including the sanctions regime – have now been used by the EU. They are a clear signal when norms of appropriate state behavior are broken. Sweden is also strengthening our national system to manage challenges such as cyber and disinformation through the establishment of a National Cyber Security Centre, and an Agency for Psychological Defence.

Let me conclude by underlining that a mutual exchange between scientists, diplomats and other actors is paramount if we are to rethink arms control and shape a common understanding of what technology needs to do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am therefore particularly glad to take part in this conference, participating from the outset in a discussion that so urgently needs to take place, making sure that joint needs assessments drive technology development and not the other way around.

Thank you.