

From [Democracy Now](#) | Original Article

A treaty intended to limit the United States and Russia's long-range nuclear arsenals officially takes effect today. But the once-promising treaty, signed eight years ago by President Obama, is overshadowed by a new nuclear arms race sparked by President Trump. On Friday, the Trump administration unveiled its new nuclear weapons strategy, which involves spending at least \$1.2 trillion to upgrade the United States' nuclear arsenal, including developing some completely new nuclear weapons. Prominent anti-nuclear advocates have denounced the Pentagon's plan as "radical" and "extreme." For more, we speak with Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: A treaty intended to limit the United States and Russia's long-range nuclear arsenals officially takes effect today. But the once-promising treaty, signed eight years ago by President Obama, is overshadowed by a new nuclear arms race sparked by President Trump. On Friday, the Trump administration unveiled its new nuclear weapons strategy, which involves spending at least \$1.2 trillion to upgrade the United States' nuclear arsenal, including developing some completely new nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Posture Review calls for developing low-yield warheads, which critics say blur the lines between the nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, meaning they are more likely to be used. It also reportedly seeks to expand the number of scenarios under which the United States might consider the use of nuclear weapons, including in response to a major cyberattack. As *The New York Times* reports in a front-page [article](#) today, quote, "The Pentagon envisions a new age in which nuclear weapons are back in a big way."

This is Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan speaking Friday about the Pentagon's Nuclear Posture Review, known as the NPR.

DEPUTY DEFENSE SECRETARY PATRICK SHANAHAN: This review is consistent with U.S. nuclear policies since the end of the Cold War. It reaffirms that the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear policy is deterrence, and continues our clear commitment to nonproliferation and arms

control. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has worked to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons. But the world looks different since the last

NPR

in 2010. The challenging and dynamic security environment requires steady action to strengthen deterrence. This

NPR

responds to today's security needs with a tailored nuclear deterrence strategy and flexible capabilities for effective deterrence.

AMY GOODMAN: Prominent anti-nuclear advocates have denounced the Pentagon's plan as "radical" and "extreme." World leaders have also criticized the plan. Russia said it risked provoking a renewed nuclear arms race. China accused Trump of engaging in a new Cold War. Iran's foreign minister said the plan brings the world "closer to annihilation."

This comes as the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists advanced the Doomsday Clock 30 seconds closer to midnight. The clock is a symbolic timekeeper that tracks the likelihood of nuclear war and other existential threats. It now stands closer to midnight than at any time since 1953. The scientists directly cited President Trump's nuclear policies as one of the reasons for advancing the clock.

For more, we go to Geneva, Switzerland, where we're joined by Beatrice Fihn, the executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. It is the latest organization to win the Nobel Peace Prize. It won in December.

Beatrice Fihn, well, first of all, congratulations on the Nobel Peace Prize. And talk about what this, what's called the NPR, the Nuclear Posture Review, the Trump administration's plans for nuclear weapons, what it means for world peace.

BEATRICE FIHN: It's a really dangerous new policy. We have already had a very dangerous *status quo*

for many years. And this just increases, really, the risk of nuclear war. It is a policy that lowers the threshold for using nuclear weapons and develops new types of nuclear weapons that would be easier for President Trump to use. It's dangerous, and it puts us on the path towards nuclear war, if we don't act now.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Beatrice Fihn, what are the commitments right now of the United States in terms of lowering or reducing its nuclear arsenal?

BEATRICE FIHN: Well, the United States has signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which commits it to negotiating good-faith nuclear disarmament. But so far, that has not taken place. But it's not just the United States. All nuclear-armed states, including Russia and China, France, U.K., are modernizing their nuclear arsenals, upgrading instead of reducing their arsenals.

AMY GOODMAN: Let's go to a clip of President Trump giving his State of the Union last week. He said he would beef up the U.S. nuclear arsenal and dismiss global efforts to ban nuclear weapons.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: As part of our defense, we must modernize and rebuild our nuclear arsenal, hopefully never having to use it, but making it so strong and so powerful that it will deter any acts of aggression by any other nation or anyone else. Perhaps someday in the future there will be a magical moment when the countries of the world will get together to eliminate their nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, we are not there yet, sadly.

AMY GOODMAN: During his State of the Union, Trump escalated his rhetoric against North Korea once again, calling the North Korean government "depraved," warning it poses a nuclear risk to the United States.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: North Korea's reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland. We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from ever happening. Past experience has taught us that complacency and concessions only invite aggression and provocation. I will not repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this very dangerous position. We need only look at the depraved character of the North Korean regime to understand the nature of the nuclear threat it could pose to America and to our allies.

AMY GOODMAN: So that's President Trump. Beatrice Fihn, in Geneva, Switzerland, can you

respond to both, the talking about North Korea posing an increased risk to the United States and how you see that being resolved? And specifically, what is new in what President Trump is proposing in this Nuclear Posture Review? Is it any different to what President Obama proposed in the trillion-dollar renovation of the nuclear arsenal?

BEATRICE FIHN: The situation with North Korea is obviously really dangerous, and the United States has one of the biggest nuclear arsenals in the world. It did not stop, it did not deter North Korea from going nuclear. Rather, it encouraged proliferation. And right now we see evidence that deterrence and using nuclear weapons to protect ourselves is not working. It does not create stability and peace in the region. Rather, it escalates tensions. It fuels the crisis and leads us at risk for nuclear war.

It is therefore really urgent that we find a diplomatic solution to this, instead of threatening with more bombs, bigger bombs. We need to move towards a diplomatic solution that does not involve threatening to indiscriminately slaughter civilians. This policy is—of course, it's still based on deterrence, which nuclear policy has done before in the United States, but it makes nuclear war more likely. It lowers the bar for using them. And if we keep doing this, if we keep having nuclear weapons and threatening to use them, they will be used one day.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: I wanted to ask you—you mentioned the other nuclear powers that are also attempting to modernize their arsenals. China has accused the Trump administration of embarking on a new Cold War. Could you talk about that response and also what China is doing or isn't doing?

BEATRICE FIHN: In each nuclear-armed states right now, all of the nine ones are involved in big programs of upgrading and modernizing. And we see this trend with the nuclear-armed states, that they are increasing the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines. It's growing in importance for these few states.

But the rest of the world is going in another direction. Over 120 countries negotiated and concluded a treaty that prohibits nuclear weapons. So we see these two parallel trends in the world, where a few countries, the outliers, are clinging onto these weapons of mass destruction, while the rest of the world is moving beyond that, towards a new type of security policy that doesn't involve threatening to indiscriminately murder civilians.

AMY GOODMAN: In 2016, we [spoke](#) to Setsuko Thurlow, a survivor of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, anti-nuclear activist now, has worked as a social worker for decades in Toronto, Canada, serving Japanese-speaking immigrants. She recounted what happened that day, August 6, 1945.

SETSUKO THURLLOW: I was a 13-year-old, grade eight student at the girls' school. And I was mobilized by the army, like together with a group of about 30 schoolmates. And we were trained to act as decoding assistants. And that very day, being Monday, we were to start the day's work, the full-fledged decoding assistant. At 8:00, we had a morning assembly, and the Major Yanai gave us a pep talk. And we said, "We will do our best for emperor's sake." And at the moment, I saw the bluish white flash in the windows. I was on the second floor of the wooden building, which was one mile, or 1.8 kilometers, away from the ground zero. And after seeing the flash, I had a sensation of floating in the air. All the buildings were flattened by the blast and falling. And, obviously, the building I was in was falling, and my body was falling together with it. That's the end of my recollection.

AMY GOODMAN: So, that was Setsuko Thurlow speaking to *Democracy Now!* A few months later, she would be with you, Beatrice Fihn, in Oslo, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, as you both gave an acceptance speech. You also just returned from Nagasaki, where—can you tell us what you did, and also, specifically, what you think has to be the approach of the United States and other nations in dealing with nuclear war?

BEATRICE FIHN: Yeah, I was just in Nagasaki. And it was incredibly moving to be at the place, as I also visited Hiroshima, to see with my own eyes what—the places where nuclear weapons have been used. And I think it's a very important thing to do if you're working on nuclear weapons, because this is what we're talking about. I watched the press conference of the Nuclear Posture Review on Friday and was struck by how incredibly sterile and abstract the language is. But we're talking about cities, of schools, hospitals, houses, civilians. That is what nuclear weapons are meant to do: wipe out entire cities. I think that is the perspective we have to have in order to start solving these problems.

We know that if we keep nuclear weapons forever, they will be used again. And when I was in Nagasaki, it was exactly when the false alarm of an incoming missile came to Hawaii. And to be there and to hear these stories of survivors of what happens after nuclear bombs are being used, what happens the days after, the weeks after, how people try to rebuild their lives afterwards again, deal with the consequences, and to know that in Hawaii mothers and fathers were hiding their kids, running for their lives, trying to figure out who to call those last minutes,

it's unacceptable that we have this threat still. It is unacceptable that we keep living under this problem, that we can—we can solve it.

And states have to really start thinking about nuclear weapons as real weapons. These are not just geopolitical tools. These are big bombs that are waiting to be launched. And a miscalculation, an accident, intentional use, if we do that, it will be a humanitarian disaster that would violate the laws of war that were already agreed on, huge human rights problems, environmental degradation. And it's really urgent that we do something about this before they are being used again.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Beatrice Fihn, when you were in Japan, you were denied a meeting with the prime minister of Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. I'm wondering your sense, Japan being the one country in the world that was subjected to nuclear attack, what the posture of the current government of Japan is, compared to those in the past, on nuclear weapons.

BEATRICE FIHN: The Japanese government is a very close military ally to the United States and feels like it also needs to be protected by nuclear weapons. And again, this problem is that we look at nuclear weapons as some kind of safety blanket, something that keeps us safe, when it actually increases the threats. It puts us at a higher risk than if we don't have nuclear weapons. If you look at the situation in North Korea, people of South Korea, people of Japan, they don't feel particularly safe right now, because of nuclear weapons. Adding more nuclear weapons do not make us more safer. So I think it's—there's a gap in Japan between the people that want to honor the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the people in Tokyo, perhaps, that are very closely allied, and the government, that are closely allied to the United States military. But I think it is—there are ways to do both. We just need to stop relying on weapons of mass destruction. We don't have to leave military allies, but we need to stop thinking that indiscriminately killing of civilians is a legitimate defense method these days.

AMY GOODMAN: Beatrice Fihn, we want to thank you for being with us, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the latest winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Beatrice Fihn accepted the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of her group.