



Statement at the General Debate of the United Nation's First Committee

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As prepared

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States Delegation wishes to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. We look forward to working with you, and we pledge our support for your efforts to ensure that this session of the First Committee is a productive one.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to address this body today to highlight the U.S. commitment to the goal of making the world a safer place and to outline our efforts, together with the international community, to reduce the threat of nuclear war and armed conflict. First of all, let me say that I am unabashedly proud of the efforts the United States has made in this most vital of undertakings. It is a record of solid achievement that I am privileged to share with you today.

Let me cite just a few examples and, in the process, clear up some apparently continuing misunderstandings.

It is popular to call for removing nuclear weapons from "hair-trigger alert." Frankly, in order to take action to comply with this request, we would first have to put our weapons on "hair-trigger alert," so we could then de-alert them. The fact is that U.S. nuclear forces are not and have never been on "hair-trigger alert." U.S. nuclear forces are planned and postured to provide the President with maximum decision time and flexibility. Multiple, rigorous procedural and technical safeguards exist to guard against accidental or unauthorized launch. Likewise, we continue to hear calls for us to fully implement the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1990-91. Again, it is a matter of public record that the United States completed implementation of these commitments in 2003.

We also continue to hear the charge that the United States has "abandoned the START process," in spite of the fact that the U.S. has been fully engaged with our Russian partners in devising a post-START framework for over a year. Further, critics assert that the Moscow Treaty simply puts nuclear warheads on a shelf and does not represent meaningful disarmament. Once more, it is a matter of public record that not only has the United States doubled the amount of funds dedicated to dismantling warheads, but has accomplished a remarkable 146 percent increase in dismantled nuclear weapons over the previous year's rate, almost tripling its goal of a 49 percent increase.

One wonders how such progress can be overlooked. In doing so, some have despaired - perhaps sincerely, perhaps not - that further progress on strengthening norms against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction cannot take place until and unless there is some progress on disarmament.

To those who say progress on disarmament and non-proliferation are out of balance, I say that the United States fully agrees. It is time for the international community to make the kind of gains on strengthening nonproliferation norms that we have made in reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons and the degree of reliance on those weapons in national security strategies. But first, let me clarify U.S. policies and programs in hopes that our message may be clearly and unequivocally understood.

The United States is a Leader in Disarmament and Fighting Proliferation

Mr. Chairman, by 2012, the U.S. nuclear stockpile will be reduced to nearly one quarter of what it was at the end of the Cold War, and U.S. operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads will be reduced to about one third of 2001 levels. These reductions include our most modern systems, the Peacekeeper ICBM, which has already been completely deactivated, and the removal from strategic service of four Trident ballistic missile submarines. Under the START treaty, we have eliminated over 1,000 strategic missiles and bombers and 450 ICBM silos. We have now fully implemented the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiative by destroying the last of over 3,000 tactical nuclear warheads.

We have down-blended more than 89 metric tons of highly enriched uranium (HEU) from our defense stockpile into low-enriched reactor fuel and delivered an additional 10.6 metric tons to commercial facilities for near-term down-blending. The United States and Russia have committed to convert a combined total of 68 metric tons (that is, 34 tons from each country) of weapon-grade plutonium into forms unusable for weapons, primarily by burning it as mixed-oxide reactor fuel. Secretary of Energy Bodman recently announced that his department will remove nine more metric tons of plutonium from further use as fissile material in U.S. nuclear weapons.

Under a U.S.-Russian agreement to eliminate 500 metric tons of HEU from dismantled Russian nuclear weapons, Russia has so far down-blended 306 metric tons from Russian weapons into reactor fuel. If one uses the IAEA values for "significant quantities" of nuclear material relevant to nuclear weapons, these initiatives would correspond to enough material to make over 20,000 nuclear weapons.

The United States has provided funding for over 60,000 former Soviet weapons scientists to do peaceful commercial work. We have also assisted Russia in downsizing and securing its nuclear weapons complex in a manner Russia determined to be consistent with maintaining its own security. In this regard, the people of the United States have provided the states of the former Soviet Union with billions of dollars in assistance.

Numerically, the scale of disarmament by the United States and the former Soviet Union since the end of the Cold War is unparalleled in history. The United States calls upon all nations to halt the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices, as the United States has done.

Moreover, the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) established a blueprint for creating a new strategic Triad that indeed includes, but significantly no longer relies solely on, nuclear weapons. Providing future U.S. Presidents with the strategic capabilities called for in the NPR will give those Presidents more information, more options, both offensive and defensive, and more time to make critical decisions, thus raising the decision threshold for use of nuclear weapons. It was precisely the new thinking embodied in the NPR that allowed for the historic reductions we are continuing today.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, for over a year the United States has been engaged in a strategic dialog with our Russian partners with the goal of having a new framework in place prior to START's expiration in 2009. While it would obviously be improper to share details of those discussions now, some general observations can safely be made. Initial START negotiations began during the Reagan-Andropov era, a markedly different one than we are in today. START was an important milestone in the history of the Cold War and served an important role in reducing tensions. Some aspects of that agreement may continue to have salience today. On the other hand, it was a Cold War document and the Cold War is over. We are hopeful that we will be able to carry forward those concepts from the treaty that may still be useful, while developing new concepts more in tune with our new strategic relationship.

Our Delegation takes this opportunity to note that, just last month, the United States of America and the Russian Federation celebrated a truly historic event: the twentieth

anniversary of the establishment of our respective Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers. The underlying premise was simple: confidence-building through information exchange to "avoid the risk of accidental nuclear war." For twenty years, the two Centers have helped make peace work. They have evolved from supporting a bilateral agreement in two languages to supporting almost twenty treaties and agreements, in six languages, with over fifty countries. The proven, two-decade-long record of the two Centers makes them an attractive tool for future requirements in transparency and confidence-building, and a model for other nations seeking improved communications and exchanges of information.

As another sign of our commitment to transparency in nuclear disarmament, the head of our nuclear weapons program - the Department of Energy's Thomas D'Agostino - along with Will Tobey of the same department and Christopher Ford, the U.S. Special Representative for Nuclear Nonproliferation, will provide a briefing on U.S. disarmament efforts next Monday, October 15 at 1:15 in Conference Room 6.

U.S. Support to Multilateral Solutions

The development and pursuit of nuclear weapons by Iran and North Korea represent two of the greatest threat to international peace and security. The United States remains committed to working with international partners to reach diplomatic solutions to these serious challenges.

Nowhere is the U.S. commitment to multilateral solutions more evident than with regard to the ongoing Six-Party Talks regarding North Korean denuclearization. As called for in the September 2005 Joint Statement and the February 13, 2007 Initial Actions Agreement, the parties continue to work toward the verifiable dismantlement of North Korean nuclear facilities and a listing of all North Korean nuclear programs. American, Russian and Chinese experts have visited the facilities at Yongbyon, and discussions are ongoing as to how to move forward with dismantlement, with the objective of achieving maximum disablement by the end of calendar year 2007. Through these efforts, the United States, South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia have worked to persuade the North Korean government to move closer to fulfilling the goals of the September 2005 Joint Statement, achieving the full denuclearization of North Korea, and returning North Korea to the NPT and to IAEA Safeguards.

Regarding Iran, the unanimous adoption of two UN Security Council resolutions, 1737 and 1747, imposing Chapter VII sanctions on Iran demonstrates the international community's unity on this issue. As a consequence of Iran's refusal to comply with its international obligations, we believe that the Council must move forward as soon as possible to adopt a third resolution under Chapter VII imposing additional sanctions measures.

Mr. Chairman, seeking multilateral solutions toward ensuring the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons has for decades been and remains a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. The United States is engaged with many nations represented in this hall in the development of policies and systems that seek to reduce the risk of proliferation or to stop proliferation when it is happening.

The Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the NPT) remains the most universal tool in the nonproliferation toolbox. The NPT, however, confronts tremendous challenges today, the most fundamental being the crisis of noncompliance with its core of nonproliferation provisions. This challenge should require no elaboration, but it is worth emphasizing that this year was the first time that NPT States Parties have commenced a fresh review cycle since some of the worst of these problems first appeared in the public eye.

Some key points bear mentioning in this regard:

- This is the first review cycle to have begun after public revelation of Iran's two-decade-long clandestine nuclear program and after its nuclear weapons ambitions became clear to the international community;
- It is the first review cycle to have begun after the revelation of Libya's secret nuclear weapons program, and we applaud Libya's courageous decision to end it;
- It is the first review cycle to begin since public revelations about the A.Q. Khan nuclear smuggling network that supplied enrichment technology and nuclear weapons-related designs to both Libya and Iran;
- It is the first review cycle since North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Treaty, and since that country's subsequent nuclear detonation. However, we are encouraged by recent actions taken by North Korea and by the collective determination of the 6-Parties in helping us get to this point;
- Finally, this is the first review cycle to have commenced since debates in NPT fora have come to focus upon what the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General has referred to as the "Achilles heel" of the regime -- the spread of technology giving more and more states the ability, if they choose to do so, to overcome the principal remaining technical hurdle to proliferation: producing fissile materials usable in nuclear weapons.

Together, these developments and others present the NPT regime today with the most significant challenges it has ever faced: how to ensure the integrity and continued viability of the Treaty in the face of flagrant nonproliferation noncompliance. Failure to ensure NPT compliance undermines the bedrock objective of the NPT: assurance against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 is an excellent example of how the international community can work together to create effective tools to combat proliferation. The United States has strongly supported multilateral efforts for UNSCR 1540. Regional organizations have supported activities under UN Security Council Resolution 1540, hosting nearly a dozen important workshops and working directly with 1540 Committee Experts on implementation of the resolution.

There are substantial benefits to be gained through full and effective implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540 and a firm commitment to its objectives. Not only is international security enhanced, but capacities applicable to other national priorities are built, from augmenting trade and export controls through demonstrated "good practices" and improving the capacity to mitigate threats to public health and security.

UNSC Resolution 1540 also provides increased transparency and cooperation within regions and with other UN Member States, the Secretariat and international organizations such as the IAEA, the OPCW and the many NGO's that often provide important background materials and venues for this unique and across-the-board effort to reduce our collective risk from weapons of mass destruction.

The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism held its third meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan this past June. This initiative, which now numbers 60 participating nations, seeks to prevent the availability of nuclear material to terrorists, improve capabilities of participating nations to detect such materials, promote information sharing and law enforcement cooperation, and help establish appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, and other measures.

The Proliferation Security Initiative, better known as PSI, which now numbers 86 partner nations, is another global initiative of the United States to counter the growing challenge posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials worldwide. PSI builds on efforts by the international community, including existing treaties and regimes, to prevent proliferation of such items, and is consistent with and a step in the implementation of the UN Security Council Presidential Statement of January 1992, which states that the proliferation of all WMD constitutes a threat to international peace and security, and underlines the need for member states of the UN to prevent proliferation.

Mr. Chairman, no discussion of multilateral solutions would be complete without a few words on the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Under the invigorated leadership of its six Presidents, the P-6, the Conference conducted its most substantive discussions on issues related to disarmament in many years. With the exception of a handful of states, all members of the Conference on Disarmament agreed on, or agreed not to prevent consensus on, a proposed Program of Work, the closest we have come to this goal in over 10 years.

As members of this Committee are well aware, the single most important issue that the Conference on Disarmament can and should address is a legally binding ban on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. The international community has expressed a desire for such a treaty in one form or another for decades, and it is irresponsible to delay further.

Mr. Chairman, the United States has demonstrated considerable flexibility in trying to enable the Conference on Disarmament to begin substantive work this year. It is well known that the United States prefers a clear path to negotiations of an FMCT, without reference to any other issue. We have spoken against linkages for years and continue to believe they are unhelpful, especially when discussing such an important issue as an FMCT.

Despite these concerns, the United States made the conscious decision this year that it would not stand in the way of consensus on a P-6 proposal for a Program of Work at the Conference on Disarmament, and we actively urged all delegations to demonstrate the same flexibility. This year we saw the finish line, but could not quite cross it. We are resolved to do so next year.

Many ascribe our failure to achieve a program of work as evidence of a lack of political will. Our delegation does not share that view. The question is not one of political will, but one of national security interests. Put simply and clearly, not all members of the Conference believe it is in their national security interest to renounce the further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Rather than bemoan the false issue of political will, we should redouble our efforts to convince all members of the Conference that no state's security would be harmed by such a production ban. Our delegation looks forward to making that case in Geneva in the coming year.

Developing a New Security Environment

Mr. Chairman, the challenges before us today in stemming proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are daunting. Yet for too long, many have taken the easy path of relegating all responsibility in this regard to the nuclear weapons states. That may be politically expedient, but it ignores the reality of today's world. The NPT never envisaged complete nuclear disarmament without regard to the international security environment. Indeed, just the opposite is true.

Nuclear weapons continue to have relevance in today's world, and that relevance is clearly not incompatible with the NPT. Indeed, until the countries of the world can create the environment necessary for nuclear weapons to be entirely eliminated - which is the ultimate aspiration of all NPT States Parties - we submit that the protection which the United States extends to its allies has actually slowed nuclear proliferation and helped make it less likely that new nuclear arms races will emerge.

Mr. Chairman, one may ask, "What is the environment necessary for ongoing reductions in nuclear weapons to continue to their logical conclusion?" Such a security situation includes clear and full compliance on the part of all states with their international obligations, particularly those under the NPT. It also requires a world in which the community of nations works together to ensure that their territories do not provide safe haven for terrorists or the trafficking of WMD and the materials to produce them. We are talking about a world in which nations can transcend the competitive military dynamics and concerns that, to date, have encouraged reliance upon nuclear weapons.

Such circumstances are not easy to achieve. But they are not unimaginable, and the NPT makes clear that all States Parties should be committed to this ultimate goal. Sovereign states ultimately have the responsibility and, in most cases, the capability to act to stem WMD proliferation.

Conventional Arms

Mr. Chairman, let me note that conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, are perhaps a more immediate threat than weapons of mass destruction. I would like to point out that the United States has been a leader in destroying land mines and excess small arms and light weapons. We have been a leader in working to achieve consensus on multilateral agreements to restrict weapons that may cause unnecessary suffering or have indiscriminate effects. The U.S. led the way in negotiating the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its five protocols, we worked hard to achieve a protocol on anti-vehicle mines, and when such a protocol could not be achieved, joined 24 other states in issuing a policy declaration indicating humanitarian steps we were prepared to take in this area. Earlier this year we announced our readiness to enter into a negotiation in the CCW framework to deal with humanitarian concerns about cluster munitions. We hope that others will join us in beginning negotiations on an instrument on cluster munitions next year.

Conclusions

Mr. Chairman, the United States has been and will continue to be a leader in defending international regimes for non-proliferation and combating efforts to defy them. We also will, after prudent and careful deliberation, continue to take national actions to make the international community safer from the risk of nuclear war. However, despite the actions of the international community and the United States, challenges remain. We must maintain our resolve as an international community to combat them.

Mr. Chairman, the First Committee this year has the opportunity to use the enhanced mechanisms that delegations have put in place since 2003 to strengthen the international security dialogue. We all must do our best to set aside our differences and work together to demonstrate the determination of the international community to thwart those who seek to undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Our Delegation is encouraged by the work done this year, and we will do our best to continue this momentum, both during this session and next year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

