Mr. Chairman, my delegation will vote “No” on draft resolution L.47, “No first placement of weapons in outer space” (“NFP”). In considering the Russian Federation’s NFP initiative, the United States took seriously the criteria for evaluating space-related transparency and confidence-building measures, TCBMs, that were established in the 2013 consensus report of the Group of Governmental Experts, GGE, study of outer space TCBMs. That study was later endorsed by the full General Assembly in Resolutions 68/50 and 69/38, both of which the United States co-sponsored with Russia and China, as well as a resolution that is being considered this year in the First Committee. As the GGE report stated, non-legally binding TCBMs for outer space activities should: be clear, practical, and proven, meaning that both the application and the efficacy of the proposed measure must be demonstrated by one or more actors; be able to be effectively confirmed by other parties in their application, either independently or collectively; and finally, reduce or even eliminate the causes of mistrust, misunderstanding, and miscalculation with regard to the activities and intentions of States.

In applying the GGE’s consensus criteria, the United States finds that Russia’s NFP initiative contains a number of significant problems: first, the NFP initiative does not adequately define what constitutes a “weapon in outer space.” As a result, States will not have any mutual understanding of the operative terminology. Second, it would not be possible to effectively confirm a State’s political commitment “not to be the first to place weapons in outer space.” Thus, the application and efficacy of the proposed measure could not be demonstrated.

Third, the NFP initiative focuses exclusively on space-based weapons. It is silent with regard to terrestrially-based anti-satellite weapons, and thus could contribute to increasing, not reducing, mistrust and miscalculations.

To date, the NFP initiative’s proponents – including Russia – have not explained, and did not explain during the First Committee’s Thematic Discussion, how the NFP initiative is consistent with the GGE’s TCBM criteria, nor how such an initiative enhances stability in outer space when it is silent with regard to terrestrially-based ASAT weapons.

Given these problems and the absence of a satisfactory explanation by the NFP initiative’s proponents, the United States has determined that the NFP initiative fails to satisfy the GGE’s consensus criteria for a valid TCBM. Thus, the NFP initiative is problematic and unlikely to be timely, equitable, or effective in
addressing the challenges we face in sustaining the outer space environment for future generations.

Therefore, as we did last year, the United States will again vote “No” on this First Committee resolution and intends to vote “No” again in the full General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, the United States believes it is not in the international community’s interest to engage in a space weapons arms race. Such a race would not bode well for the long-term sustainability of the space environment. Indeed, U.S. efforts, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, seek to prevent conflict from extending into space. To that end, the United States continues to engage in sustained dialogue to identify, develop, and implement tangible TCBMs that are consistent with the recommendations of the 2013 GGE report. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.