2017 UNGA First Committee  
Delegation of the United States of America  

General Debate Statement by:  
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Thank you, Madame Chair.

On behalf of the United States Delegation, I congratulate you and the Iraqi Delegation on your election as Chair of the 72nd UN General Assembly First Committee. We pledge our full support as you ably guide the important work of this body.

Madame Chair, the United States has taken many steps to reduce the number of, and reliance on, nuclear weapons, doing so in ways that preserve strategic stability. The total U.S. nuclear stockpile is down nearly 87% since its Cold War peak. We expect to meet the central limits of the New START Treaty when they take effect in February 2018. When we do, the United States and Russian strategic nuclear stockpiles will be at their lowest points since the 1950s. The United States also ended production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons in the 1990s, and has removed hundreds of tons of fissile material from weapons programs. These actions make clear that the United States is committed to its undertaking in NPT Article VI to pursue effective measures toward nuclear disarmament.

However, none of these actions occurred in a vacuum. Indeed, many landmark arms control agreements were negotiated immediately after the Cold War, when security conditions were conducive to such steps. Unfortunately, today’s security environment is substantially more challenging. Tensions are rising in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East; rogue states flout their nonproliferation obligations; and, several states are building up, not reducing, their nuclear stockpiles. We must address these challenges in order to create the conditions to enable further nuclear disarmament negotiations.

North Korea

Madame Chair, the single greatest security threat the world faces today is that posed by North Korea’s continued development of UN-proscribed nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, as well
as other weapons of mass destruction. Since July alone, North Korea has tested a nuclear device it describes as a hydrogen bomb for an ICBM, two ICBMs, and it has twice launched a ballistic missile over Japan. North Korea continues to produce plutonium, and admits to enriching uranium for use in nuclear weapons. Each of these actions violates multiple UN Security Council resolutions, and collectively they present a security threat not just to Northeast Asia, but to the entire international community.

As Secretary of State Tillerson recently articulated, the United States continues to seek a diplomatic solution to this crisis, and does not seek regime change in North Korea, the collapse of the regime, accelerated reunification of the peninsula, or an excuse to send our military north of the Demilitarized Zone. At the same time, the United States remains fully committed to defending itself and its allies. We will continue to work with the Republic of Korea and Japan to take all necessary measures to deter and defend against any attack from North Korea. North Korea’s persistent and provocative actions underscore the need for every country in this room to implement our UN Security Council obligations, and to impose increased diplomatic and economic pressures on the regime until this crisis is resolved.

**Syria Chemical Weapons Use**

Madame Chair, the United States strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and at any time. Whether by a State or non-State actor, such use is intolerable, and those that use such weapons must be held accountable. The Assad regime’s abhorrent continued use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict was vividly and horrifically on display in the regime’s April 4th chemical weapon attack at Khan Shaykhun. The Assad regime’s actions demonstrate blatant disregard for international law, including Syria’s obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

The Assad regime must declare fully its chemical weapon program and cooperate with the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, Declaration Assessment Team, and the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. The OPCW Fact-Finding Missions are still reviewing many credible allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria. The United States supports Security Council action to renew the Joint Investigative Mechanism’s annual mandate as soon as possible. A prompt renewal of the mandate will ensure that all chemical weapons incidents can be fairly and impartially investigated. The United States will also continue to press for accountability for the use of chemical weapons through all appropriate means, including the OPCW and the UN Security Council.

**U.S. Compliance Resolution**

Madame Chair, this year the United States is running its triennial resolution on “Compliance with nonproliferation, arms limitation and disarmament agreements and commitments.”
Ensuring and maintaining compliance with such agreements is an essential element of international peace and security, and our resolution intends to demonstrate and strengthen the global consensus on this important topic. We welcome maximum co-sponsorship and support for the resolution this year.

**Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

Madame Chair, the United States understands and appreciates the desire to make progress on nuclear disarmament. However, as the example of North Korea makes clear, we cannot ignore the current global security challenges that unfortunately make nuclear deterrence necessary, both for ourselves and for our allies. It would be, therefore, irresponsible for the United States to subscribe to the recently-introduced “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.” Indeed, we are concerned that the treaty is not just unproductive, but even counterproductive. The ban treaty serves to reinforce and widen political divisions in existing bodies, while unhelpfully creating a potential alternative forum to the NPT review process. It also endorses an insufficient standard for safeguarding nuclear material, eschewing a requirement for the more rigorous Additional Protocol. Undermining the legitimacy and capacity of existing nonproliferation and disarmament institutions will not help future progress. It will hinder it.

We therefore urge all states not to sign the ban treaty, and instead work with us on measures that have the potential to make real progress toward our shared goals. The United States will continue to work with all states through existing, consensus-based fora to address the nonproliferation and security challenges we all face. We also remain committed to pursuing effective measures toward nuclear disarmament, as called for in the NPT. While progress is slow, sometimes dauntingly so, that is no reason to disregard the institutions and ideas that have helped us achieve success in the past, and will do so again in the future.

Thank you.