Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States Delegation, I congratulate you and the Romanian delegation on your election as Chair of the 73rd UN General Assembly First Committee. We pledge our full support as you ably guide the important work of this body.

Mr. Chairman, the United States has long been a global leader in efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and advance nuclear disarmament in ways that improve the security of all states. As we mark the 50th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the fruits of these efforts are apparent. Fears of cascading nuclear proliferation did not come to pass, and we are all more secure and prosperous as a result. On the disarmament front, the total U.S. nuclear stockpile is down by approximately 88% since its Cold War peak. The United States and Russia continue to implement the New START Treaty and met the central limits of the Treaty in February, placing U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear stockpiles at their lowest points since the 1950s.

But the numbers do not tell the whole story. The United States 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. We continue to abide by our moratorium on nuclear explosive testing and support the International Monitoring System and International Data Center to ensure that all states can have confidence in our ability to detect nuclear explosions. These actions clearly demonstrate our commitment to practical steps on nuclear disarmament, consistent with our undertaking in NPT Article VI to pursue effective measures to that end.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is pleased to have played a leading role in the substantial progress made in recent decades, and we know there is more work to be done. At the 2018 NPT PrepCom, the United States submitted a working paper on “Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament” – what we’re calling the CCND approach. We unveiled the CCND approach at the PrepCom as we believe it is the most realistic way to address disarmament in the NPT review process. I know the word “conditions” has caused consternation for some, so allow me to clarify: this is not an effort to place additional “conditions” or roadblocks on progress on nuclear disarmament. Rather, “conditions” refers to the state of the security environment and its unfortunate deterioration. CCND is an invitation for all states to join us in a realistic dialogue about the state of the security environment – the world as it is – and how we can shape that environment in a way that makes progress on disarmament possible.
While we view CCND as an initiative that will strengthen and help maintain the NPT, key factors of the security environment that shape states' thinking on disarmament involve states that are not Parties to the NPT and issues that go beyond what can be accomplished in the NPT review process. UN First Committee – given its universal membership and the broad range of security issues we deal with in this forum – is an ideal venue for continuing and broadening this discussion.

A realistic assessment of the security environment must recognize, regrettably, that we have much work to do to create conditions conducive to nuclear disarmament, given that tensions are rising across the world. With that in mind:

- Long-running regional tensions remain high in South Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Nuclear stockpiles in Asia are growing.

- Key nuclear weapon states – namely Russia and China – are modernizing and expanding their nuclear capabilities and pursuing destructive counter-space weapons at the same time they are becoming increasingly assertive in challenging the existing international order.

- The Assad regime in Syria continues to flout its international obligations and the standards of human decency by using chemical weapons against its own people. And Russia and Iran continue to shamelessly defend these actions and shield the regime from consequences in various international fora.

- Similarly, Russia itself used chemical weapons in its brazen assassination attempt against the Skripals in Salisbury in March 2018 using a novichok chemical agent.

- In addition to this blatant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia continues to violate its obligations under other arms control agreements, including the INF and Open Skies Treaties.

- Iran has refused to come clean about its past nuclear weapons program; remains a WMD proliferation threat, continues to destabilize the Middle East with its support for terrorism and militancy; and continues its development, testing, and proliferation of ballistic missiles.

- On North Korea, while we remain hopeful for progress on the basis of recent diplomatic engagement, we must maintain pressure on Pyongyang until we achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea.

This is not an exhaustive list, but rather illustrates some of the major challenges that confront us. And, as daunting and seemingly intractable as these challenges are, they cannot be simply wished away or ignored.

Mr. Chairman, there are some who argue that by pointing out these challenges, the United States is looking for an excuse to delay or abandon further steps on disarmament. It is this line of
thinking that leads some states to embrace efforts like the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which is claimed as a silver bullet that can jump start nuclear disarmament without addressing the security challenges that cause states to rely on nuclear deterrence or engaging in the difficult work that can produce real reductions in nuclear weapons. Proponents of the TPNW do not offer solutions to these security challenges, or even acknowledge that they play a role in states' thinking about deterrence and disarmament. They do not offer a way to verify nuclear disarmament or ensure compliance, or even acknowledge the need to address compliance concerns with existing arms control and disarmament treaties. Instead, they seem to believe that we can skip to the final step of this process – simply banning nuclear weapons – and trust that the details will work themselves out. This flies in the face of decades of experience with nuclear arms control – experience that has produced the dramatic reductions in nuclear weapons that have been achieved over the past half century.

The choice being presented by TPNW advocates – between doing nothing and pursuing unrealistic hopes for a simpler solution – is a false one. Our CCND initiative offers a practical way forward. Progress toward nuclear disarmament and enhancing all states' security is hard work, but it is important work and the stakes are too high to avoid it in favor of unrealistic and unproductive shortcuts. We invite all states who truly share those goals to join us in reinvigorating that work by engaging in a realistic dialogue about the world as it is and the steps we can take to reshape it into the world we would like it to be.

We also support direct dialogue on what can be done to improve security conditions in regional contexts, including the Middle East. We fully support the long-term goal of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems. However, we unequivocally reject coercive efforts to use this forum to dictate the terms and modalities for pursuing that long-term goal in a manner that lacks the consensus support of all the regional states. Despite the rhetoric advanced by the sponsors of any such initiatives, efforts to impose such mechanisms are neither consensus-based, nor constructive. We urge regional states to engage their neighbors directly to identify a mutually acceptable vision for advancing dialogue on this issue.

Mr. Chairman, the United States shares the long-term goal of the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. We have always shared that goal across many different Administrations. Indeed U.S. leadership has been key to the considerable progress that has already been made toward this objective, and we are committed to continuing to work with all states to address the security challenges we face and create an environment conducive to further progress.

Thank you.