Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States remains a leader in efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and is committed to reducing nuclear stockpiles in ways that advance international security. History illustrates not only the steadfast U.S. commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament, but also that progress on this front is inherently tied with the international security environment. The easing of Cold War rivalries in the late 1980s and early 1990s allowed the United States and Russia to make significant reductions in their arsenals, which are now down 88% since their Cold War peak.

Unfortunately, the security environment has dramatically deteriorated in recent years. Several states with nuclear weapons are modernizing and expanding their nuclear capabilities. Regional tensions and conflicts in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East persist. Several key arms control treaties are under strain due to the noncompliance of key state parties. With respect to nuclear weapons in particular, Russia’s continued violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is unacceptable and is an untenable situation. These underlying symptoms must be addressed if we are to successfully pursue additional effective measures related to nuclear disarmament, as called for in NPT Article VI.

It is for this reason that the United States is advocating for an approach which focuses on “Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament,” or CCND. States must have a realistic expectation of what can be accomplished on nuclear disarmament at a given time and in given circumstances, and must first work together to address the fundamental challenges which predicate the need for nuclear deterrence. We welcome all states to join us in this dialogue, particularly as we move forward through the NPT review process in advance of the 2020 Review Conference.

Although the circumstances are no doubt challenging, there are reasons to be optimistic. The United States and Russia both met the New START Treaty’s central limits when they went into effect on February 5th of this year, capping each country at 1,550 deployed warheads, and 800
ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers. This represents the lowest levels of such systems since early in the Cold War. The United States remains committed to fully implementing the Treaty.

Additionally, regarding North Korea, we remain hopeful for progress on the basis of our recent discussions with the DPRK. It is important for all states to maintain pressure on Pyongyang until we achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea.

These examples are illustrative of the CCND approach: taking methodical steps which consider the international security environment, while also emphasizing the need for verification provisions which ensure compliance with agreements after they are agreed. They also stand in stark contrast to the approach taken by the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which jumps straight to the perceived solution of total nuclear disarmament, without doing any of the hard work necessary to achieve this outcome. It contains no verification provisions, and does not acknowledge the important role nuclear deterrence plays in protecting international security. It foregoes the deliberate approach that has led us to every success on nuclear disarmament, in favor of brevity and political expediency. This may provide an easy narrative, but it does not move us any closer to eliminating nuclear weapons; on the contrary, it serves to increase political divisions in this and other nonproliferation and disarmament bodies, making future disarmament efforts more difficult.

The United States stands ready to work with all states toward the long-term goal of the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. The CCND approach is simply an acknowledgement that in order to achieve this goal, we must work to remedy the circumstances which currently make nuclear deterrence necessary. This is work that all states can, and must, be engaged in. U.S. leadership has played an important historical role in contributing to past disarmament efforts, and our desire to engender progress in this field is steadfast and enduring. We are dedicated to working with this body to seek common solutions to our collective challenges, in order to create a safer and more prosperous world.

Thank you.