Statement by Stephen Rademaker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, on Confronting Today’s Threats, in the First Committee of the General Assembly, October 3, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin by saying how pleased I am to see the representative of a close friend and ally, Ambassador Choi from the Republic of Korea, chairing this body. Mr. Chairman, the United States Delegation looks forward to working with you and the other members of the Bureau to make this session a constructive one that demonstrates the value of our revitalized First Committee.

In this regard, our Delegation wishes to make special note of your distinguished predecessor, Ambassador De Alba of Mexico, another close friend, whose skilled chairmanship guided this Committee last year to its adoption by consensus of Resolution 59/95 and other measures to improve our collective effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman, this year’s meeting of the First Committee is especially significant, as it follows the recent Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference and the High-Level Event. Both of those gatherings were unable to produce consensus statements of arms control and nonproliferation priorities. The United States does not, however, share the oft-expressed view that those meetings were failures because they did not produce consensus statements. We consider more significant the fact that these meetings demonstrated overwhelming consensus on certain common goals, which I intend to spell out here, and which our Delegation will emphasize over the next five weeks.

One point on which we all agree, Mr. Chairman, is the importance of UN reform. The High-Level Event made a start in that direction, but did not go nearly far enough. Delegations in the First Committee can take justified pride in having taken the lead in revitalizing the General Assembly. Now it is up to delegations to take advantage of our decisions last year to focus this Committee’s work on the challenges that we face today and will face in the future.

Naturally, most of the responsibility for refocusing the Committee’s activities falls on the member states. No single resolution or rule or procedure will ensure that States refrain from introducing outdated resolutions, or that delegations participate actively in sessions set aside for thematic debate, or otherwise consult in a transparent manner. Delegations may rest assured, however, that the United States Delegation will bear its fair share of this burden.

Mr. Chairman, the challenges that we confront today differ profoundly from those of the Cold War. During the Cold War, we worried about nuclear war between the United
States and the Soviet Union, and we relied on deterrence and a web of bilateral strategic arms control treaties to contain that risk. The preoccupations of the 21st Century are different, however, as are the policies required to address today’s threats. Today, our foremost fear is the acquisition and possible use of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states, by terrorists, or, perhaps most worrisome of all, by terrorists armed by rogue states. Deterrence is a weak reed on which to lean in confronting these kinds of actors, who fundamentally will not be deterred. Moreover, traditional arms control treaties alone cannot protect against these risks, particularly in a world where certain countries do not honor their commitments, as enshrined in those treaties. We need to elaborate more appropriate strategies to address the threats we face today.

I am pleased to report that the United States, joined by many other members of the international community, is making progress in developing new strategies for confronting today’s threats.

A prime example is the Proliferation Security Initiative, which President Bush launched two years ago in Krakow, in order to strengthen our collective capacity to stop shipments of WMD, their delivery systems, or related materials to or from states or non-state actors of proliferation concern.

Since then, like-minded countries, including many represented here, have put their diplomatic, military, law enforcement, and intelligence assets to work in a multinational, yet flexible, fashion. We have begun applying existing laws and legal principles in innovative ways, cooperating as never before to interdict shipments, disrupt proliferation networks, and hold accountable the front companies that support them. These efforts have yielded concrete results. PSI cooperation, for example, in a number of instances has stopped the transshipment of material and equipment bound for ballistic missile programs in countries of concern, including Iran.

PSI is not a treaty-based initiative. There is no formal organization with a budget or with a headquarters. Rather, it is a set of activities among participating nations, which act in a manner consistent with their respective national legal authorities and international law to deter, disrupt, and prevent WMD proliferation.

We also have established new mechanisms through the UN to address the WMD proliferation threat. In April 2004, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1540, establishing legally binding obligations on all UN member states to enact and enforce legal and regulatory measures to prevent proliferation of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and their delivery systems by state or non-state actors.

Governments also have been working to impede the ability of proliferators to access banking systems, and to form partnerships with legitimate companies. As one of the requirements in Resolution 1540, States must put in place laws designed to prevent the provision of any form of assistance, including financial, to non-state actors that attempt to develop, acquire, or transfer WMD and their means of delivery. G-8 leaders at the Gleneagles Summit emphasized the need for further cooperation to “identify, track and
freeze relevant financial transactions and assets.” To this end, President Bush has issued Executive Order 13382, which authorizes the United States Government to freeze assets and block transactions of entities and persons engaged in proliferation activities. We urge other states to consider how they might implement similar authorities, consistent with UNSCR 1540.

The United States also has proposed measures to prevent nuclear proliferation by strengthening controls on enrichment and reprocessing technology. We will continue to work for agreement on these controls in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, while also working to ensure that States renouncing enrichment and reprocessing have reliable access to fuel for civil nuclear power reactors. We are working with major suppliers and the International Atomic Energy Agency on an assured supply mechanism to provide a backup for states that forgo investment in an indigenous enrichment or reprocessing capabilities.

Beyond this list of initiatives, Mr. Chairman, I wish to stress our continued commitment to addressing today’s threats through traditional diplomacy. We are working diplomatically and energetically to address two of the most serious proliferation threats facing the world today: North Korea and Iran. As all delegations are aware, North Korea and Iran exemplify the alarming breakdown of compliance with the core non-proliferation undertakings contained in Articles II and III of the NPT that we confront today from a small number of countries.

In the case of North Korea, our goal is to preserve the NPT by insisting on the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of both the plutonium and the uranium nuclear weapons programs in that country, as well as the dismantlement of all nuclear weapons. We are pleased that, just two weeks ago today, we and our partners in the six-party process were able to agree on a joint statement that, we hope, will provide a path to the realization of these objectives.

In the case of Iran, IAEA investigations have exposed almost two decades of clandestine nuclear work, as well as a pattern of evasion and deception, that can only be explained as part of an illegal nuclear weapons program. Earlier this year, the United States lent its strong support to the efforts of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany to negotiate objective guarantees that would assure the international community that Iran has given up the pursuit of nuclear weapons. In August, however, Iran spurned these negotiations by violating the 2004 Paris Agreement on which the negotiations were founded. This, in turn, led to the adoption by the IAEA Board of Governors, just one week ago, of a resolution finding Iran in noncompliance with its nuclear nonproliferation obligations, and committing the Board to report Iran’s noncompliance to the United Nations Security Council and to the General Assembly, as required under the IAEA Statute.

We applaud this exercise in effective multilateralism, and hope that it will persuade the Iranian government to return to the negotiating table on the basis of the 2004 Paris Agreement. Should Iran decline to do so, however, the Board of Governors will have no alternative but to fulfill its obligation under the IAEA Statute and the recently adopted
Board Resolution to report the matter to the United Nations. In the meantime, we hope that all governments will take note of the Board’s finding of noncompliance and adjust their national policies accordingly. We think it self-evident, for example, that, in the face of such a finding, no government should permit new nuclear transfers to Iran, and all ongoing nuclear projects should be frozen.

Mr. Chairman, the United States continues to support the immediate start of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty in the Conference on Disarmament. FMCT is an issue ripe for negotiation, and we are convinced that an agreement negotiated quickly would contribute to international security.

As delegations know well, the United States has concluded that effective verification of an FMCT is not realistically achievable, and that to include ineffective verification provisions would create an appearance of assurance that does not comport with reality. For this reason, we oppose including verification measures in an FMCT. Consequently, the United States supports a negotiating mandate that does not refer to verification measures. We advocate the adoption of a clean negotiating mandate on FMCT, unencumbered by linkages to unrelated proposals. We hope that the CD -- I repeat, the CD -- can get to work on this matter soon after it reconvenes in January. In the interim, the United States renew its call on all States that have not done so to implement moratoria on fissile material production for nuclear weapons purposes. We are gratified that all but one of the NPT nuclear weapon states have done so already, consistent with their Article VI obligations and as an example to others.

Along with an FMCT, the United States also has proposed that the CD negotiate a ban on the sale or export of all persistent landmines. We believe that this measure would help alleviate the serious problem created by the widespread use of landmines that last long after battles are over, and that maim and kill tens of thousands of innocent civilians every year. This approach complements other international restrictions on landmines, and we urge the members of the CD to give it prompt and favorable consideration.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to provide the Committee with an update on the latest developments in nuclear disarmament. On the 19th of last month, the United States completed the deactivation of its entire force of Peacekeeper intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs. Just three years ago, this missile force comprised 50 ICBMs, each capable of carrying ten nuclear warheads. All now have been taken out of service, consistent with our obligations under the Moscow Treaty of 2002. The empty Peacekeeper silos will remain accountable under the START Treaty, and will be subject to inspection. This latest step implementing President Bush’s policy of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons provides fresh evidence of the fulfillment by the United States of its obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

Mr. Chairman, new challenges call for new solutions. I have outlined for the Committee some of the new approaches that the United States is taking to combat today’s threats. In the effort to contain these threats, perhaps even more than during the Cold War, the cooperation of all responsible governments is essential. Our Delegation urges the
Committee and the States represented here to do their part, and reaffirms its commitment to work with all willing delegations in pursuit of an effective multilateralism.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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