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Regional Issues, including with respect to
the Middle East and Implementation of the 1995 Middle East Resolution

Statement by
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Mr. Chairman, in my remarks for Cluster Two I have touched upon many of the
important themes of today's debate on regional issues, including the Middle East. I would like,
however, to say a bit more today -- for these points bear emphasis -- and our discussion today
presents an important opportunity to review and assess regional developments as they relate to
the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

The United States has not been shy about making clear that today's cases of
nonproliferation noncompliance constitute a fundamental challenge to the credibility of the
Treaty and the security of the entire international community. I will also touch on our common
objective of NPT universality. To enhance their mutual security, the States Party must work
together to tackle the dangers of nuclear proliferation wherever they may arise. In recent years,
the regime has faced significant challenges from states that have not upheld their obligations and
defied the international community. How we all, as States Party to the NPT, choose to respond
to these cases of noncompliance will help whether policymakers of the future will take the NPT
seriously.

Iran's nuclear program is perhaps the pre-eminent challenge in this regard. The NPT is
designed to establish a framework within which States Party can place trust in the peaceful
nature of nuclear programs in non-nuclear weapons states. Iran's longstanding covert and
defective nuclear activities have seriously undermined that trust. Iran's behavior is in fact
undermining the foundations of the Treaty itself, for if a State Party can pursue nuclear weapons
with impunity under the pretense of exercising rights recognized by the Treaty, then one would
be hard-pressed to describe the NPT as a "nonproliferation" treaty at all.

Nor is Iran the only proliferation challenge that faces us today. North Korea's violation of
its own obligations, which culminated in its October 2006 nuclear test, continues to pose an
urgent challenge to the global nonproliferation regime. In addition, the recent evidence of
Syria's covert construction of a nuclear reactor -- in violation of the very procedures designed to
reassure the international community of the peaceful intent of nuclear activities -- highlights the
threat these programs pose to the foundations of the Treaty. The reactor Syria was clandestinely
constructing — and of which it still denies the very existence — was a curious one indeed. It was neither configured for power production nor linked to Syria's power grid, it was isolated from any civilian population that might have desired electricity, and it was ill-suited for research. The secret, undeclared reactor would have been well suited, however, for one purpose: plutonium production. What a coincidence, Mr. Chairman! Furthermore, we are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert activities.

Above and beyond the obvious implications for global and regional security, treaty violations that are so blatant hurt the nonproliferation regime by hindering efforts to realize the goal of universal adherence to the NPT. In order to achieve universal adherence, the NPT must provide a viable security framework — and this requires that compliance be ensured. Who would wish to join a treaty if other Parties' compliance with its rules were, in effect, optional? How could such an instrument provide the critical assurance against proliferation that is the NPT's central purpose? By undercutting confidence that NPT adherence provides meaningful assurances about the solely peaceful nature of Parties' nuclear programs, noncompliance undermines the security framework upon which so much depends.

While recognizing that agreeing to adhere to the NPT is a sovereign decision, the United States continues to hold the view that States Party should support and reinforce the goal of universal NPT adherence. We welcome and encourage all non-Parties to accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states as soon as possible, and we continue to support the goal of universal adherence by seeking to strengthen the nonproliferation regime, by encouraging the three countries that have not joined the NPT to exercise nuclear restraint, and by insisting that all Treaty Parties comply with their obligations. Ultimately, a rigorous approach to compliance will help strengthen the regime and promote NPT universality by demonstrating to non-parties that the Treaty can indeed provide meaningful and enduring security benefits.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Within the context of a stable, comprehensive regional peace, the United States supports the objective of a Middle East that is verifiably free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery. As is clear from the Resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 NPT Review Conference — which in the first of its operative paragraphs recognizes that efforts in support of the aims and objectives of the Middle East peace process contribute to the goal of freeing the region of all WMD — progress toward this goal requires progress toward a political and security environment in the Middle East that is conducive to security for all states in the region. The United States will continue to work for real progress on this front.

This topic is obviously a very important one here at this Preparatory Committee meeting, and has been the subject not only of much discussion but of a number of specific, written contributions to our ongoing debates — such as the working paper submitted by my friend and colleague the distinguished Ambassador from Egypt. I am glad, Mr. Chairman, that this body is able to have such deep and detailed discussions without being impeded by the political and procedural gamesmanship we saw last year.
Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, Iran’s disregard for its NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations, as well as for its obligations pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolutions, undercuts the Treaty and risks sparking a regional reaction that could further strain the NPT and would almost certainly doom hopes for universal adherence. Iran violated its nonproliferation obligations for nearly two decades by pursuing a secret program involving undeclared procurement and use of nuclear materials while aiming to covertly acquire the most sensitive elements of the nuclear fuel cycle -- including uranium enrichment and plutonium separation -- activities conducive to the pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. First publicly revealed in 2002, these Iranian breaches of safeguards obligations have been confirmed by the IAEA in over a dozen reports beginning in 2003. For several years, the IAEA has sought to resolve outstanding questions about the nature and scope of Iran’s nuclear activities. At every step, however, the most significant information the IAEA has learned about Iran’s safeguards breaches has been confirmed only grudgingly by Iran, if at all, and only when it had become clear that hard evidence contradicted each layer of excuses previously offered by the Iranian government.

Over the last two years, the international community’s concern about Iran’s nuclear intentions was amplified by the IAEA reports regarding indications of Iranian nuclear weaponization efforts, which were described in detail in the IAEA’s February 2008 report and technical briefing on Iran. The IAEA says these reports are a matter of “serious concern” and “critical to an assessment of a possible military dimension to Iran's nuclear program” and rejects Iran’s claim that they are “baseless fabrications.” We believe these reports should raise serious questions for all States Party regarding Iran’s compliance with its NPT Article II obligations.

Sadly, Mr. Chairman, Iran’s refusal to provide the necessary level of transparency and to comply with its obligations continues today, for Tehran still refuses to make a full disclosure of all of its nuclear activities, including those related to weaponization, and refuses to suspend its proliferation sensitive nuclear activities despite being required to do so in U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1737, 1747, and 1803.

Iran’s persistence even in the face of consistent, widespread, and strong international concern, and after its continued rejection of the generous package of incentives offered by the P5+1 countries, highlights further the inconsistency between Iran’s actions and its professed interest in nuclear technology only for peaceful production of electrical power.

If Iran is indeed serious about using nuclear power to meet its energy needs, the best way for it to proceed is to suspend its proliferation-sensitive activities and accept the P5+1 offer, which -- should Iran choose to comply with its UN Security Council and IAEA obligations -- includes active international support in building state-of-the-art civil nuclear power reactors and reliable access to nuclear fuel. As I noted yesterday, Mr. Chairman, while Tehran claims its aspiration is nuclear energy “independence,” Iran lacks the uranium reserves necessary for nuclear energy “independence” on any meaningful scale even if it does master uranium enrichment. It will, in other words, remain dependent upon foreign suppliers one way or the other. Indeed, Iran’s domestic reserves of uranium are really only sufficient for one coherent purpose: they are quite marvelously suited for a small nuclear weapons program.
Iran’s longstanding noncompliance with its NPT, IAEA, and U.N. Security Council obligations and failure to make full disclosure to the IAEA, in particular regarding past weaponization work, is damaging the credibility of the NPT and the broader international nuclear nonproliferation regime. By pretending peaceful intent while standing in chronic, continued defiance of its IAEA safeguards and U.N. Security Council obligations, Iran is undermining prospects for a WMD-free Middle East and for NPT universality. As I have made clear here already, Mr. Chairman, Iran, however, is not the only country in the Middle East to have shown disregard for its NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations. Syria, as it was recently revealed, was secretly constructing a reactor that we believe was not intended for peaceful purposes.

NORTHEAST ASIA

North Korea’s nuclear weapons program presents another threat to regional and global security and an urgent challenge to the global nonproliferation regime. North Korea’s violation of international nonproliferation obligations and norms, culminated in its October 2006 nuclear test, and was manifested in its clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria.

North Korea’s noncompliance with its NPT obligations surfaced more than a decade ago. Indeed, North Korea has never fully met its obligations under the NPT and IAEA safeguards, despite a good faith effort by many countries and the IAEA. North Korea is known to have successfully pursued a plutonium-based weapons program based at the Yongbyon nuclear facility, which is now being disabled in accordance with agreements reached in the Six-Party Talks.

North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT on January 11, 2003, and on February 12, 2003, the IAEA Board of Governors adopted a resolution deciding to report North Korea’s noncompliance with its safeguards agreement to the U.N. Security Council. North Korea stated in February 2005 that it had manufactured nuclear weapons, and on October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted a nuclear test, despite repeated warnings from the international community including a Presidential Statement from the U.N. Security Council.

North Korea’s provocative act resulted in the unanimous adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718, which among other things condemned the test and demanded that North Korea return to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards, as well as to the Six-Party Talks. The United States has made clear repeatedly, and at the highest levels of our government, its commitment to achieving the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner, as envisioned in the September 19, 2005, Joint Statement.

On February 13, 2007, the Six Parties issued the Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement (of September 2005), in which North Korea committed to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and return at an early date to the NPT and IAEA Safeguards. Under this agreement, the DPRK committed to shut down and seal the Yongbyon nuclear facility, for the purposes of its eventual abandonment, and to invite back IAEA personnel to conduct necessary monitoring and verification activities as agreed between the DPRK and the IAEA. These actions have been completed.
On October 3, 2007 the Six Parties issued the “Second-Phase Actions for the Implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement.” Under the “Second-Phase Actions agreement,” North Korea agreed to disable all its existing nuclear facilities, beginning with the three core facilities at Yongbyon by December 31, 2007. Additionally, North Korea agreed to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs -- in accordance with the February 13 agreement -- by December 31, 2007, and reaffirmed its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how. North Korea has agreed to cooperate on verification activities in line with this commitment, and to provide additional explanations as necessary.

While most of the agreed disablement actions at the three core facilities at Yongbyon have been completed, North Korea missed the deadline to provide a complete and correct declaration, and the United States continues to work closely with our Six-Party partners to press North Korea to provide the complete and correct declaration of its nuclear programs, facilities, and materials, including clarification of uranium enrichment and all proliferation activities, as soon as possible. We also press to see that all agreed disablement actions at Yongbyon are completed safely and expeditiously.

We will continue to work closely with our Six-Party partners to ensure that the Six-Party process continues to prove an effective tool for addressing our proliferation concerns and ending the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program.

The United States has repeatedly noted that with denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, many things are possible. The abandonment of North Korea's nuclear programs would open the way for normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations and a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. This process, however, cannot move forward without the full implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement, leading to the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and North Korea's return to the NPT and IAEA safeguards as a non-nuclear weapons state.

SOUTH ASIA

The situation in South Asia, Mr. Chairman, poses a further set of unique challenges related to States that do not have NPT obligations. Let me reiterate that the United States continues to believe that all countries that are not NPT Parties should adhere to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states. We recognize, however, that India and Pakistan are not likely to join the Treaty for the foreseeable future. Until universal adherence is attained, therefore, we place a high priority on ensuring that states outside the NPT regime use nuclear technology responsibly.

We remain deeply concerned by the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in South Asia, and we do not believe that these weapons enhance regional security. We welcome recent signs of improved relations between India and Pakistan. We continue to urge both countries to exercise nuclear and missile restraint, to bring their export controls in line with the guidelines of the multilateral supplier regimes, and to discuss and implement confidence-building measures designed to reduce regional tensions and diminish risks that nuclear weapons could be used, either intentionally or accidentally, in a crisis.
We also remain cognizant of our nonproliferation commitments and objectives when considering how to improve our bilateral relations with each country. Our actions with both India and Pakistan continue to be scrupulously consistent with our NPT obligations and with our commitment to the Nuclear Suppliers Group Guidelines.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, unless States Party collectively take concerted steps to address the proliferation challenges in the Middle East and Northeast Asia, we risk undermining the effectiveness and credibility of the NPT and of the global nonproliferation regime as a whole. Ensuring strict compliance with NPT obligations is a prerequisite for creating conditions that reinforce and advance regional stability and security, and which in turn improve conditions for NPT universality.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.