As Delivered

Thank you, Yaiv, and thank you to General (Ret.) Yadlin and all the staff at INSS for hosting me. It is an honor to be here. As you all know, John Kerry was sworn in as the new U.S. Secretary of State just about a week and a half ago. He begins his tenure at State fully seized of the challenges that we face around the globe, including the future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Under the direction of our new Secretary, the Department of State will continue its efforts to support this vital regime. The title for this conference is apt. We are at a crossroads, but not a dead-end. Over the course of the last 40 years, the NPT has taken some hits, not least this highly provocative act announced by North Korea today. But it is precisely because of those hits that we have acquired the experience needed to deal more effectively with the challenge of nuclear proliferation.

In order to look to the future, it is important to remember the past. It was just over 50 years ago that tension brought on by the Cuban Missile Crisis threatened to turn the Cold War hot. The world watched in fear for those 13 days in October 1962 when Soviet missile placements in Cuba very nearly became the spark that would start a fire we could not possibly control.

As the United States and the Soviet Union teetered on the edge of nuclear war, leaders in Washington and Moscow sought a diplomatic solution. One of the challenges confronting both sides was making sure that their perceptions, objectives, and proposals were getting across to each other clearly. This was not an easy thing to do without email, dedicated phone lines or fifty years of cooperation across many different issues.

Resolute and sober in their determination, leaders in Washington and Moscow stepped back from the brink of a nuclear conflict, using every avenue available to settle the crisis peacefully. After those frightening 13 days, both sides learned ways to reduce the tension in our relationship.

A New Beginning

To say that things have changed dramatically since October 1962 is an understatement. The Cuban Missile Crisis was a turning point. The United States and the Soviet Union came to the edge of the abyss and then started to back away from it. In the months following the crisis, a “Hotline” between the Kremlin and the White House was established, allowing for direct, immediate communications between our leaders.

In the summer of 1963, in a Commencement Address at American University, President John F. Kennedy laid out a bold vision on how we could turn away from what had seemed like an inevitable march towards nuclear catastrophe.

“Peace need not be impracticable,” he said, “and war need not be inevitable. By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all peoples to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly toward it.”

I like that concept. Defining goals does make things more manageable. Working step by step, we can slowly fix seemingly intractable, unsolvable problems.

In that particular speech, one of the defined goals was to achieve a ban on nuclear testing. While it was not comprehensive, the Limited Test Ban Treaty went into force just four months later. It outlawed nuclear explosive tests on land, in the sea, in the atmosphere and in space. This was a tremendous step in the right direction and one that helped create political conditions to conclude the NPT, an even more ambitious treaty, several years later.

The Path Before Us

The grand bargain of the NPT, where nuclear weapon states pursue disarmament, non-nuclear weapon states abstain from the pursuit of nuclear weapons and all countries are able to access the benefits of peaceful nuclear energy, sets an enduring standard that is as relevant today as it was at the Treaty’s inception. For over forty years, the regime has bent, frayed and broken in places, but it has never collapsed. It has slowed the tide of proliferation; it has facilitated cooperation among its States Parties; and it has institutionalized the norms of nonproliferation and disarmament.

Despite our past successes, there are very pressing challenges all around us and on the horizon. Most critically, we have grave concerns about the actions of a few countries. North Korea, Iran and Syria violated their NPT obligations, and have failed to take the steps necessary to rectify these violations. The United States is
Having just run through the challenges and opportunities, the road ahead can seem daunting. Some states continue to forsake their freely taken and legally binding obligations. Proliferation is aided by the speed and anonymity provided by the information age. Conflicts around the globe make cooperation difficult or dangerous. The United States will also work with all Parties to discourage states from abusing the NPT’s withdrawal provision, a priority we share with many of our international partners.

Regarding the disarmament agenda, there have been successes on both the bilateral and multilateral fronts. The United States is committed to a step-by-step process to reduce the overall numbers of nuclear weapons. The two year anniversary of the New START Treaty’s entry into force has just passed. As many of you know, I was the lead New START negotiator for the United States and it is very satisfying to see how pragmatic, business-like and positive the implementation has been. We are now exploring the possibilities of what a future agreement with Russia would look like – one with reductions in all categories of nuclear weapons – strategic, non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed.

Beyond bilateral treaties, ratification and entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains a top priority for the United States. As we move forward with our ratification process, we encourage all other nations to do the same. We also remain committed to launch negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. It is unfortunate that, to date, the Geneva Conference on Disarmament has been blocked in its efforts to move this agreement forward.

We are also engaging with other P5 states on disarmament-related matters. Following the first meeting in London in 2009, P5 conferences were held in Paris in 2011 and Washington in 2012. At those high-level meetings, we started discussions on key nuclear weapons related issues, including confidence-building, transparency, and verification experiences. Russia announced recently that it will host the next P5 conference in April, just before the second NPT PrepCom.

While some are quick to dismiss the utility of meetings and conferences, they would be forgetting their history. As the United States and Russia approach the lowest levels of deployed nuclear warheads since the 1950’s – and that will happen when the New START Treaty is fully implemented in 2018 – it is important to remember that their success was born out of direct communication. Communication builds trust. Trust paves the way for cooperation. This is the type of process we are cultivating in the P5 setting.

We also support new frameworks for civil nuclear cooperation that reduce the spread of dangerous technologies. Establishment of an IAEA fuel bank represents an important step forward, as it can help assure the reliability of nuclear fuel supply and avoid the unnecessary investment in indigenous enrichment.

Forging Ahead

Having just run through the challenges and opportunities, the road ahead can seem daunting. Some states continue to forsake their freely taken and legally binding obligations. Proliferation is aided by the speed and anonymity provided by the information age. Conflicts around the globe make cooperation difficult or dangerous.

The United States will also work with all Parties to discourage states from abusing the NPT’s withdrawal provision, a priority we share with many of our international partners.

Building on our pledge to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our defense strategy, we are also making progress on nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ). The nuclear-weapon states, also known as the P5, and ASEAN have agreed on a revised Protocol to the Southeast Asia NWFZ (SEANWFZ) Treaty that resolved outstanding differences. We hope that the Protocol signing can take place soon.

For its part, this Administration sent the protocols to the African and South Pacific NWFZs to the U.S. Senate for its advice and consent. The United States also remains committed to consulting with the Central Asia NWFZ (CANWFZ) parties to reach an agreement that would allow us – along with the rest of the P5 – to sign the protocol to that treaty.

A longer term goal is achievement of a Middle East zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. The United States supports this goal and stands ready to help facilitate discussions among states in the region at the proposed Helsinki conference. But we do so recognizing that the mandate for a zone can only come from within the region; it cannot be imposed from outside or without the consent of all concerned states. We regret the Helsinki conference could not be convened last year, but remain committed to working with our partners to create conditions for a successful event.

An immediate concern is securing vulnerable nuclear materials in order to keep them out of hands of terrorists. Under President Obama’s direction, we have held two Nuclear Security Summits, with a third to take place in The Hague next year. In anticipation of the Hague Summit, we will continue to build on pledges that are resulting in more material secured, removed and eliminated. These are real and durable achievements that help protect nations against the threat of nuclear terrorism. We will continue to use the Summits to strengthen the global architecture – the treaties, institutions, norms and rules – that governs nuclear security, and to promote the concept of “assurance;” that is, states execute their sovereign security responsibilities in ways that assure neighbors, allies and rivals that they are doing so effectively. Israel and others here are valued partners in the Summit process, and we look forward to continued cooperation to promote these shared goals.

As we move forward with our ratification process, we encourage all other nations to do the same. We also remain committed to launch negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. It is unfortunate that, to date, the Geneva Conference on Disarmament has been blocked in its efforts to move this agreement forward.

We are also engaging with other P5 states on disarmament-related matters. Following the first meeting in London in 2009, P5 conferences were held in Paris in 2011 and Washington in 2012. At those high-level meetings, we started discussions on key nuclear weapons related issues, including confidence-building, transparency, and verification experiences. Russia announced recently that it will host the next P5 conference in April, just before the second NPT PrepCom.

While some are quick to dismiss the utility of meetings and conferences, they would be forgetting their history. As the United States and Russia approach the lowest levels of deployed nuclear warheads since the 1950’s – and that will happen when the New START Treaty is fully implemented in 2018 – it is important to remember that their success was born out of direct communication. Communication builds trust. Trust paves the way for cooperation. This is the type of process we are cultivating in the P5 setting.

We support new frameworks for civil nuclear cooperation that reduce the spread of dangerous technologies. Establishment of an IAEA fuel bank represents an important step forward, as it can help assure the reliability of nuclear fuel supply and avoid the unnecessary investment in indigenous enrichment.

Forging Ahead

Having just run through the challenges and opportunities, the road ahead can seem daunting. Some states continue to forsake their freely taken and legally binding obligations. Proliferation is aided by the speed and anonymity provided by the information age. Conflicts around the globe make cooperation difficult or dangerous.
Even in the face of these challenges, it is incumbent upon us to find ways to strengthen nonproliferation norms, bolster compliance and quickly adapt to ever-changing circumstances and security needs.

There are some new tools that could aid us in our travels. The United States is and has always been committed to innovation, and the arms control and nonproliferation arenas are no exception. To respond to the challenges we face, we are thinking about creative ways to use technologies – including open source technologies – to tackle long-standing verification and monitoring problems. We hope that other states will join us in this endeavor.

All of what I have discussed will require hard work. However, we are at a crossroads, not a cliff. We are fully able to choose the path that leads us to a safer, more secure world. We have with us the lessons of the Cold War and the knowledge that even in our darkest hours, we found a way forward. In his speech at American University 50 years ago, President Kennedy left the students with a final thought:

“Confident and unafraid, we labor on--not toward a strategy of annihilation but toward a strategy of peace.”

We have come a long way since then, but we have a long way to go. We just have to keep moving forward step by step, confident and unafraid.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.