An International Ban on the Production of Fissile Material for Nuclear Weapons

U.S. Mission Geneva

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"If we are serious about stopping the spread of [nuclear] weapons, then we should put an end to the dedicated production of weapons grade materials that create them."

– President Barack Obama

The United States is revitalizing an international effort to advance a multilateral treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.

Background

Fissile material is nuclear material capable of producing an explosive nuclear chain reaction. Highly enriched uranium and plutonium are the fissile materials that are expected to be captured by a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). Some countries already have voluntarily stopped producing fissile material for nuclear weapons. The United States, for example, has not produced plutonium for weapons since 1988 and halted production of highly enriched uranium for weapons in 1964. However, some countries continue to produce fissile material for weapons to build up their nuclear arsenals.

Elements of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty

A Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty would, for the first time, place a legal ban on the production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Achieving a verifiable FMCT has long been a core element of the United States' comprehensive agenda for seeking the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. It is broadly considered to be the next fundamental step towards multilateral nuclear disarmament.

An FMCT would effectively cap the fissile materials available for use in nuclear weapons. It also would help consolidate the advancements in arms control since the end of the Cold War and provide the basis for further, deeper reductions in nuclear arsenals. Finally, in states possessing nuclear weapons there are enrichment and reprocessing plants capable of producing fissile material that do not operate under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. An FMCT would fold these facilities into an international monitoring regime.

The Way Ahead

The United States believes that the Conference on Disarmament (CD) is the preferred forum for negotiation of an FMCT, but the venue for the negotiations ultimately is less important than the treaty itself. An overwhelming majority of CD members support the early commencement of FMCT negotiations. The United States is consulting with China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom, as well as others, to find a way to reach consensus and move forward on an FMCT. As Secretary of State Clinton said, the United States believes that an FMCT is "too important a matter to be left in a deadlock forever."

A Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty Will:

- Place a legal ban on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.
- Consolidate the advancements in arms control since the end of the Cold War, while moving beyond bilateral reductions.
- Enhance the irreversibility of future reductions in nuclear arsenals.
- Place under international monitoring key nuclear facilities that can produce fissile material.