Presentation by Special Envoy of the Prime Minister Shri Shyam Saran on “India and the Nuclear Domain” at the India International Centre

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Ever since India and the United States declared their intention to resume bilateral cooperation in civilian uses of nuclear energy on July 18, 2005, there has been a national debate on India’s place in the nuclear domain, both civilian and strategic. This debate is welcome. It enables public opinion to be educated on what has hitherto remained a relatively esoteric field. In this connection, may I commend the IIC for sustaining this initiative in the public domain. Attention has been focused on the significance of nuclear energy to our achieving energy security. There has also been a scrutiny of our strategic weapons programme and how that relates to our national security. These are important issues and need sober and objective reflection based on reliable information.

In the course of this debate, we have also drifted away from what has been, for decades, independent India’s conviction that it must lead the way towards a non-violent, equitable and peaceful world, a world free from the shadow of mass annihilation.

My objective today will be, as someone associated with the negotiations on the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement, to endeavour to explain the original motivation behind the initiative and its implications for our strategic programme. I will also touch upon the issue of nuclear disarmament and explain why, in the current international context, it is a goal that India should advocate with renewed vigour.

Let me share with you the mandate which Prime Minister gave to us as negotiators when we took up this initiative with the United States. Since 1974, India had been the target of an increasingly selective, rigorous and continually expanding regime of technology-denial, not only in the nuclear field but encompassing other dual use technologies as well. It was our aim to seek the dismantlement of these inequitable regimes, which would become progressively more detrimental and significantly impact upon India’s maturing economy, as its key sectors, required constant technological upgradation.

In pursuing this objective, we were acutely aware of the following:

(i) The multilateral technology-denial regimes whose targeting of India we sought to end such as the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) would require the United States to take the initiative as the principal initiator and leader of these regimes, and also because it remains the world’s pre-eminent source of new and innovative technologies.

(ii) Since our PNE in 1974, technology denial was first limited to nuclear-related technologies and then progressively expanded to cover a growing range of dual-use technologies. For this historical reason, it was clear to us that unless we