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The Global Nonproliferation Regime and the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Perhaps we should begin with a brief description of nuclear weapons. In 1945, with the advent of the atomic bomb, humanity for the first time had created a weapon with which it could destroy itself. Soon after 1945, a vast nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union began. During its course the United States built some 72,000 nuclear weapons and the Soviet Union 55,000. The bomb that completely destroyed the city of Hiroshima in 1945 had an explosive yield of 12.5 kilotons, or the equivalent of twelve and a half thousand tons of TNT. Soon nuclear weapons began to be measured in megatons, a million tons of TNT equivalent. U.S. strategic bombers in the 1960s carried up to four 25-megaton bombs. One such bomb represented explosive power in excess of the explosive power expended by all the sides in World War II. The Soviet Union developed a missile with a twenty-five megaton warhead. That the situation risked going out of control was an understatement.

Paul Nitze was the archetypical Cold Warrior and nuclear weapon strategist. As the author of NSC-68 commissioned by President Truman in 1950 he helped set the ground rules for the Cold War and the thermonuclear confrontation. In this Report he wrote in 1950: "In the absence of effective arms control it would appear that we had no alternative but to increase our atomic armaments as rapidly as other considerations make appropriate." But in addition to being an outstanding national leader Paul Nitze was

someone who could recognize change and respond to it. In the last op-ed that he wrote at the age of 92 in 1999 entitled “A Threat Mostly To Ourselves” he said:

"I know that the simplest and most direct answer to the problem of nuclear weapons has always been their complete elimination. My 'walk in the woods' in 1982 with the Soviet arms negotiator Yuli Kvitsinsky at least addressed this problem on a bilateral basis. Destruction of the arms did not prove feasible then but there is no good reason why it should not be carried out now."

Senator Sam Nunn in an article in the Financial Times in December 2004 pointed to the serious danger that exists as a result of the fact that fifteen years after the end of the Cold War the United States and Russia still maintain, on fifteen minutes alert, long range strategic missiles equipped with immensely powerful nuclear warheads capable of devastating each other's societies in thirty minutes. In 1995 Russia mistook the launch of a test rocket in Norway as a submarine launched nuclear missile aimed at Moscow and came within two minutes of ordering a retaliatory nuclear strike on the United States. Senator Nunn said in his article that current United States nuclear weapon policies which in effect rely on the deteriorating Russian early warning system continuing to make correct judgments as it did during the Cold War “risks an Armageddon of our own making.”

A bit more about the 1995 incident. Norway conducted an atmospheric sounding rocket experiment to make scientific observations of the aurora borealis. Norway had notified Russia of this launch several weeks earlier, but the message had not reached the relevant sections of the military. The aging Russian early warning system could not determine the nature of the rocket launch or its destination, and the Russian military

feared that it might be a launch of a U.S. submarine-based nuclear missile aimed at Moscow for the purpose of decapitating the Russian leadership. President Yeltsin called an emergency telephonic conference involving the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the Military Staff and himself among others. The “football” containing the missile launch codes was brought to Yeltsin’s office. As said, the conference came within two minutes of ordering a devastating nuclear retaliatory attack on the United States. Finally, the Russians realized their mistake and the military were ordered to stand down. Fortunately for us all, the correct decision was made that day.

In addition, former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry, a scientist not given to exaggeration, said not long ago that in his judgment there could be a greater than 50 percent chance of a nuclear detonation on U.S. soil in the next decade. And assuming effective international verification, a recent poll indicates that 73 percent of Americans and 63 percent of Russians favor the complete world-wide elimination of nuclear weapons.

Last January in an op-ed article published in the *Wall Street Journal* by George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn (and signed on to by a number of other former senior officials in the Reagan, first Bush and Clinton Administrations) the authors contend that reliance on nuclear weapons for deterrence "is becoming increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective" and that "unless new actions are taken, the U.S. soon will be compelled to enter a new nuclear era that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically even more costly than was Cold War deterrence." Noting that President Ronald Reagan had called for the abolishment of "all nuclear weapons" which he considered to be "totally irrational, totally

inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on earth and civilization," and that President Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev shared this vision, the four authors call for "reassertion of the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and practical measures toward achieving that goal..." This op-ed article is most significant in that it represents the national security establishment, far beyond the four distinguished authors, coming to the realization that the world has become so dangerous that nuclear weapons are a threat even to their possessors. This group met at Stanford last month for the second time at the invitation of George Schultz. The four authors and a number of others recommitted themselves to pursue the vision of President Reagan.

Nancy Reagan in a letter to George Schultz upon the convening of this second Conference said in part: "Thank you for letting me know of the new effort to rid the world of nuclear weapons. It was always Ronnie's dream that the world would one day be free of nuclear arms. He felt that as long as such weapons were around, sooner or later they would be used. The result would be catastrophic."

When Ambassador Max Kampelman, President Reagan's arms control negotiator, began this effort over two years ago, he invited me to lunch and while we were discussing the state of the world he said in effect: "Tom, I have lived through World War II and the Cold War, but I have never feared as much for the future safety and security of my grandchildren as I do right now. With the world as dangerous as it is at this time, with failing states and international terrorism, we must, we simply must, find a way to completely eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the earth." Max drew others into this effort and through his long association with former Secretary of State George Schultz, he persuaded him to take the lead. The first meeting at Stanford last year led to

the January op-ed article. The individuals involved are serious and committed and more is going to happen. There is full agreement that the vision of a nuclear weapon free world and the associated practical steps, such as the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty must be pursued simultaneously for either to be viable.

But the issues are serious. At a different conference the week before at Stanford, William Perry said that he believed that the world was at the beginning of a new wave of proliferation. To prevent it from happening, United States-Russia close cooperation is essential, he asserted, “but does anyone believe that to be possible?” In response, Alexi Arbatov, who was also present at this conference, stated that yes there is a problem. Let us put aside the Yeltsin years, he said. After September 11th, President Putin was the first world leader to call President Bush and against the advice of his advisors he agreed to open Russian bases in Central Asia on a temporary basis to American forces and provide heavy logistical support to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan to ease the American burden. And what did he get for this? An American request to keep the bases permanently; U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty; refusal to make the 2002 Treaty of Moscow a real Treaty rather than just an exchange of statements; NATO expansion into the Baltics; Western efforts to pull Ukraine into NATO despite the wishes of a majority of its population; and the invasion of Iraq.

And now the situation has gravely deteriorated in Pakistan. A country that is very fragile and where the risk of a coup that could be favorable to Al Qaeda is real. Pakistan is also in possession of some 40–60 nuclear weapons that really work and there could be a serious risk of terrorist acquisition of some of these weapons if there was such a coup. And with respect to Iran it may be that its government seeks nuclear weapons for a mix

of reasons: to more effectively dominate the Middle East; to buy insurance against attack by the United States; and to in some way be recognized as a great power as was the Persian Empire many centuries ago. If correct, these are motivations difficult to negotiate away. But there is a special problem associated with the idea of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Iran is not a unitary government and, whereas the top leadership might be deterred from using nuclear weapons, subsidiary organizations such as Revolutionary Guards, only to some degree subject to control by the top leadership, might not always be so deterred.

The Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the centerpiece of world security. President John F. Kennedy truly feared that nuclear weapons might well sweep all over the world. The President believed that by the late 1970s there could be two dozen or more nuclear weapon states in the world with nuclear weapons integrated into their arsenals. If that had happened there would be many more such states today. More than 40 countries now have the capability to build nuclear weapons. Under such conditions every conflict would carry with it the risk of going nuclear and it would be impossible to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of international terrorist organizations they would be so widespread.

But such weapon proliferation did not happen and the primary reason that it did not was the negotiation of the NPT and its entry into force in 1970, along with the associated extended deterrence policies -- "the nuclear umbrella" -- pursued by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Indeed since 1970, at least until now, there has been very little nuclear weapon proliferation. In addition to the five nuclear weapon states recognized by the NPT -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and

China, three states, India, Pakistan, and Israel and perhaps North Korea have built nuclear weapon arsenals -- but India and Israel were already well along in 1970. This is far from what President Kennedy feared.

But the success of the NPT was no accident. It was rooted in a carefully crafted central bargain. In exchange for a commitment from the non-nuclear weapon states (today more than 180 nations, most of the world) not to acquire nuclear weapons and to submit to international safeguards to verify compliance with this commitment, the NPT nuclear weapon states pledged unfettered access to peaceful nuclear technologies and undertook to engage in nuclear disarmament negotiations aimed at the ultimate elimination of their nuclear arsenals. It is this basic bargain that for the last three decades has formed the central underpinnings of the international nonproliferation regime.

However, one of the principal problems with all this has been that the nuclear weapon states have never really delivered on the disarmament part of this bargain and in recent years it appears to have been largely abandoned. The essence of the disarmament commitment was that pending the eventual elimination of nuclear weapon arsenals the nuclear weapon states would: agree to a treaty prohibiting all nuclear weapon tests, that is a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty or CTBT; negotiate an agreement prohibiting the further production of nuclear bomb explosive, or fissile, material; undertake obligations to drastically reduce their nuclear arsenals; and give legally binding commitments that they would never use nuclear weapons against NPT non-nuclear weapon states. None of this has been accomplished over 35 years later. The CTBT was negotiated and signed in 1996 but the U.S. Senate rejected it in 1999. There have been no negotiated reductions since 1994; nothing has ever happened on an agreement

prohibiting the further production of fissile material for weapons and even though political commitments were made by the NPT nuclear weapon states not to use nuclear weapons against their NPT non-nuclear weapon treaty partners, the national policies of the United States, Britain, France and Russia are the opposite--holding open this option.

And now the other side of the bargain has begun to fall apart. India and Pakistan eroded the NPT from the outside by each conducting a series of nuclear weapon tests in 1998 and declaring themselves to be nuclear weapon states. India, Pakistan and Israel maintain sizable unregulated nuclear weapon arsenals outside the NPT. North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003, may have built up to eight to ten nuclear weapons and has conducted a nuclear weapon test. The DPRK has agreed in principle to return to the NPT and to negotiate an end to its nuclear weapon program and significant progress has been made toward this objective, but probably the elimination of their weapons is years away and under current international arrangements can we ever be certain that North Korea has in fact declared and eliminated all of the nuclear weapons that they may have? The A. Q. Khan secret illegal nuclear weapon technology transferring ring based in Pakistan has been exposed but who can be sure that we have seen more than the tip of the iceberg? Iran is suspected of having a nuclear weapon program and admitted in late 2003 that contrary to its IAEA safeguards agreement it failed to report its acquisition of uranium enrichment technology.

And why might Iran want the nuclear fuel cycle and the attendant option to construct nuclear weapons? The nuclear program is very popular in Iran. It appears that some countries believe that ultimately the only way that they can gain respect in this world, as President Lula of Brazil declared during his first election campaign, is to

acquire nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, nuclear weapons distinguished Great Powers from others countries. The permanent members of the Security Council are the five NPT recognized nuclear weapon states. Forty years ago Great Britain and France both asserted that status was the real reason that they were building nuclear weapons. India declared in 1998 that it was now a big country, it had nuclear weapons. This high political value of nuclear weapons has not changed since the Cold War.

But how could nuclear weapons actually be eliminated? A possible course of action could be for the United States to first work quietly with Russia to try to reach an understanding. Then if successful the French, British, and Chinese could be brought in. Eventually the Indians, Pakistanis and Israelis could be included. If a general coincidence of view could be achieved among these eight states--over several years--then the project could be brought to the United Nations. The President of the United States and others of the leaders of the eight states could request an extraordinary session of the United Nations General Assembly and ask to address the Assembly. In their speeches the leaders could call for the world-wide elimination of nuclear weapons (as well as all other weapons of mass destruction) and request that the Security Council be charged to carry out this task. The Security Council could then call for the negotiation of a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons. The five Permanent Members of the Council with right of veto would already be committed. Such a treaty would require world-wide intrusive on-site inspection and probably security guarantees for a number of states such as Israel, Iran, Pakistan and North Korea on the edge of conflicts and where nuclear programs are or may be present. North Korea would return to the NPT as a verifiable non-nuclear weapon state. There would need to be an agreement by all states to apply economic and,

if necessary, military pressure to any state that did not comply with this program or that subsequently violated the negotiated arrangements. In a first stage to be negotiated the five NPT nuclear weapon states (the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia and China) and the three other longtime holdouts from the NPT (India, Pakistan and Israel) would over a period of a few years take all of their nuclear weapons off operational status. Then in a second stage, these eight states would be required to eliminate almost all of their arsenals down to very low levels over a number of years. A third and later stage would require the complete elimination of weapons but these eight states would be allowed to keep a relatively limited amount of nuclear explosive material (that is fissile material, including both highly enriched uranium and plutonium) which could be converted into a small number of weapons as a hedge against failure of the regime. This could amount to roughly enough material for five weapons each for India, Pakistan, and Israel, fifteen weapons each for Britain, France, and China and thirty weapons each for the United States and Russia. The material would be maintained under very high levels of national security protection at designated depositories and also be under international safeguards implemented by IAEA inspectors. Under various programs all other nuclear explosive material would be eliminated throughout the world. Missile defense systems could be developed by the world's leading powers on a cooperative basis as a further hedge against failure of the regime.

Nuclear power production would be reconfigured so as to make no more plutonium by the use of non-proliferative fuels and eventually advanced non-proliferative reactors. The plutonium in existing spent nuclear fuel around the world would have to be eliminated as well. Such an arrangement as described here would take a long time to

negotiate and even longer to implement but we must try for the hour is late. A final stage, years in the future, could be the verifiable elimination of the fissile material retained by the eight nuclear states, once the issue of "missing" fissile material, a feature of the nuclear weapon inventories in several of the nuclear weapon possessing states, has been effectively addressed.

But in order to achieve President's Reagan's dream--the world-wide elimination of nuclear weapons and to establish a peaceful and secure world community in the 21st century, the United States must lead; there is no alternative. But for this to happen the United States must be believed and trusted. On September 12, 2001, the United States had the trust and support of the entire world. Now, in the wake of rejection of international treaty arrangements such as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the Ottawa Convention on land mines, the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, and others; an invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq opposed by much of the world community; what appears to many as an over reliance on force rather than diplomacy, as with the escalating rhetoric over Iran (didn't we used to think we should carry a big stick and speak softly?); and rejection by some of the rules of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Protocols on the treatment of prisoners of war; that support and trust is gone and the United States is reviled and feared in many quarters of the world. Senator John McCain said last year that "America's position in the world is at an all-time low." A major worldwide poll released not long ago indicated that a substantial number view the United States as a negative influence in the world. How can the United States regain the trust of the world community? How can the United States return to our historic destiny of keeping the peace and fostering the development of

the community of nations, democracies, free market economies, the international rule of law, international institutions, and treaty arrangements?

Among other things we should:

First, resolve the United States intervention in Iraq in the best way that is possible and practical. The future of Iraq belongs to the Iraqis, we cannot ensure it for them, only the Iraqis can build a new Iraq. At an early date we must take the decision to firmly, gradually, and carefully turn over the struggle against the insurgency and chaos to the Iraqis as urged by former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird in his article in an issue of Foreign Affairs in the summer of 2006. Our presence is what has fed insurgency and it did little to prevent the civil war. Our steady but inexorable withdrawal, while at the same time doing our best to train the Iraqi forces, would strengthen the confidence and ability of the Iraqi security forces eventually to stand up to the forces of disorder.

Second, to recognize that in the wake of the Cold War the world has fundamentally changed, the nation state system that has dominated international life for the last 350 years is rapidly deteriorating. Perhaps some 50 to 70 nations around the world are inexorably slipping into the category of failed states. The United States cannot go it alone. Since the end of the Cold War there has been roughly one major nation building intervention every two years. Poverty, disease, cultural misunderstandings and machine-gun societies around the world are central national security threats; these are the principal causes of international terrorism and the primary weapons in the battle against terror and declining world order are economic, political, social, cultural and diplomatic, and only rarely military. Reconstruction in failed states is one thing, it is relatively well understood but in many cases development, of necessity involving institution building, is

essential to return failed states to a level where they can function. But to quote the well-known historian Francis Fukayama “any honest appraisal of where the ‘state of the art’ lies in development today would have to conclude that although institutions may be important we know relatively little about how to create them.” But one thing that we do know Dr. Fukayama says is that “Coalitions, in the form of support from a wide range of other countries and international organizations . . . are important for a number of reasons.”

And third, for over fifty years the United States pursued a world order built on rules and international treaties that permitted the expansion of democracy and the enlargement of international security. Over two years ago in a speech before the American Society of International Law the Secretary of State said that when the United States respects its “international legal obligations and supports an international system based on the rule of law, we do the work of making this world a better place, but also a safe and more secure place for America.” We should take such steps as ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, joining the Ottawa Land Mine Convention, becoming a part of the International Criminal Court and establishing ourselves once again as leading advocates of the international rule of law.

In this way the United States can regain its historic role and effectively lead the world community to take the urgent steps toward eventual elimination of nuclear weapons advocated by Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev and now pursued by Messrs. Schultz, Perry, Nunn and Kissinger, and many others, and provide for the safety of us all in a stable and secure Twenty-first Century.