

Ambassador Thomas Graham, Jr.

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New Weapons Policy for the Twenty-First century

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 Warrior and the thermonuclear confrontation. However, nearly 50 years later, in the last op-ed that he wrote at the age of 92 in 1999 entitled “A Danger 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.”

Senator Sam Nunn in an article in the Financial Times in December 2004 pointed to the immense 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 our current nuclear weapon policy which in effect relies 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.” Former 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 this past 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 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. will soon 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...” Among the “practical measures” toward the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons the authors listed are: ratification, under appropriate arrangements, of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test ban Treaty, changing of the Cold War posture of deployed nuclear weapons so as to increase warning time, substantial reduction of the size of nuclear forces world-wide; elimination of short-range weapons designed to be forward deployed; and the halting of production of nuclear explosive materials.

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. In 1962 there were reports that by the late 1970's there would be 25-30 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—in September of 2004, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed El Baradei, estimated that 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 principal reason that it did not was the negotiation of the NPT and its entry into force in 1970, buttressed by the policies of extended nuclear deterrence – the nuclear umbrella – followed by the United States and the Soviet Union with their Cold War Treaty Allies. 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, 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 nonnuclear 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 the United States in recent years appears to have largely abandoned it.

And now the other side of the bargain has begun to fall apart. India and Pakistan eroded the NPT from 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 of the Treaty. North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003 and may have built up to eight to ten nuclear weapons. While the new Agreement with North Korea is promising there is not resolution as yet of the ultimate disposition of this potential arsenal. The A.Q. Khan secret illegal nuclear weapon technology transferring ring based in Pakistan has been exposed but who can be sure 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 reports its acquisition of uranium enrichment technology. The Iranian case has become more serious and is now a major crisis.

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 other 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. The high political value of nuclear weapons has not changed since the Cold War.

In view of all this it may now simply be too late to attempt to change the course of nations and return to policies which will strengthen and support the NPT and the international non-proliferation regime. The NPT does not have the support today that it did in the past. In the context of a breakdown of world order and the war on terror, with the potential failure of the NPT and the ensuing likelihood of widespread nuclear proliferation that President Kennedy so rightly feared many years ago an increasing possibility, with nuclear tension a growing threat with thousands of strategic nuclear weapons still on high alert and a Russian early warning system continuing to decline in effectiveness, it is perhaps too late for nuclear arms limitation. In the interest of the security and safety of us all, a way must be found to proceed directly to the elimination of nuclear weapons, as Paul Nitze suggested over seven years ago and as the authors of the January 4th op-ed article urge.

Very difficult but not impossible. It could begin with a speech by the President of the United States at the United Nations stating that it is now United States policy that all nations must cooperate to proceed directly and as fast as practical to the elimination of nuclear weapons throughout the world. Furthermore, any nation that refuses to consider this should be considered not part of the community of nations. Any nation that subsequently violates the negotiated arrangements would be considered an outlaw and subject to economic, and if necessary, military joint action by the world community.

Extremely intrusive verification arrangements would be required. Security guarantees would likely be necessary for some states in dangerous areas. The negotiated agreement over many years could reduce nuclear weapons worldwide in stages to zero weapons with only a modest amount of nuclear explosive material – from which a small number of nuclear weapons could be reconstituted – held by the five NPT recognized nuclear weapon states and the three NPT holdouts, in different amounts, as a hedge against failure of the agreement. This material would be under strict national and international safeguards. Nuclear explosive material in both military and civic programs would be eliminated throughout the world and civil nuclear power production – absolute essential to the world economy – would be reconfigured to make no more weapon usable material. The President would then call on the UN Security Council to begin and manage negotiations toward a worldwide agreement on the elimination of nuclear weapons based on these principles.

Some might say that this is unrealistic, how could we ever hope that the United States government or any other state possessing nuclear weapons would ever contemplate such a thing? But we must press for and hope for the best and remember that nothing good is ever impossible. Who would have thought that the zero missile option proposed by President Reagan in 1981 would ever happen? Who would have thought the Cold War would end in the foreseeable future? Who would have thought that the Soviet Union would cease to exist? But all of these things did happen. But in order to achieve the 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 21, 2001, the

United States had the trust and support of the entire world. Now, in the wake of exaggerated intelligence claims; 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 of Iraq opposed by the world community; and dismissal 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 reviled and feared in many quarters of the world. Senator John McCain said some months ago that “America’s position in the world is at an all-time low.” How can we regain the trust of the world community? How can we 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 institutes, and treaty arrangements?

Among other things we should:

First, 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. We cannot go it alone. 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.

And second, 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. In April of 2005 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 again as strong advocates of the international rule of law. And beyond this we should implement all of the “practical steps” enumerated by the four January 4 op-ed authors and truly begin the process toward the world-wide, verifiable and complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

In this way we can regain our historic rule and we can and we will effectively lead the world community to a safe, secure, stable and just Twenty-first Century.