



**Former Senator Sam Nunn  
Co-Chairman, Nuclear Threat Initiative  
SAIC Nuclear Arms Control Thought Leadership Symposium  
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**Introduction – the 2006 SAIC Report**

Thank you, Beverly, for your generous introduction, and thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

Two and a half years ago, George Shultz, Bill Perry, Henry Kissinger and I stirred the pot with an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* entitled “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons.” Prior to that, an SAIC report prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency in 2006 had a significant effect on my thinking and confirmed my own assessment based on discussions around the globe.

The SAIC Report focused on “Foreign Perceptions of U.S. Nuclear Policy and Posture” and was released by Lou Dunn and others on January 8, 2006.

The 2006 Report concluded that there is a widespread perception abroad that:

1. The U.S. is placing an increased emphasis on nuclear weapons
2. U.S. nuclear policy has shifted from one of nuclear deterrence to one of preemption and first use.
3. The U.S. is lowering the nuclear threshold.
4. The difference between nuclear and conventional weapons is being blurred by U.S. policies.

The report did not agree with these perceptions, but did lay them out clearly.

The Report observed that:

1. In general, America should do a better job articulating U.S. nuclear policies.
2. We should pursue a sustained strategic dialogue with Russia and China.

3. We are missing opportunities to shape the psychology of proliferation and turn the tables on Iran, to influence tomorrow's potential seekers of nuclear weapons and to help avoid a proliferation chain reaction.
4. The report specifically recommended that the U.S.:
  - a. Defend the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence in today's world;
  - b. Reaffirm the goal of the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons;
  - c. Join the nuclear disarmament debate and shape it; and
  - d. Set out the political, technical and military conditions for contemplating a world without nuclear weapons.

#### **The 2007 and 2008 Wall Street Journal Commentaries**

In our January 2007 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, George Shultz, Bill Perry, Henry Kissinger and I examined the gathering nuclear storm – including the potential spread of nuclear weapons to states and terrorists; the proliferation of enrichment and the spread of nuclear technology and know-how; and the residual nuclear threat from the Cold War. We concluded that the world was on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era.

We proposed a number of urgent steps that would reduce risk and lay the groundwork for a safer world. Those steps included:

- Changing nuclear force postures in the United States and Russia to increase warning and decision time and ease our fingers away from the nuclear trigger.
- Reducing substantially nuclear forces in all states that possess them.
- Moving toward developing cooperative multilateral ballistic-missile defense and early warning systems that will reduce tensions over defensive systems and enhance the possibility of progress in other areas.
- Eliminating short-range “tactical” nuclear weapons – beginning with accountability and transparency among the United States, NATO and Russia.
- Working to bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force – in the United States and in other key states.
- Securing nuclear weapons and materials around the world to the highest standards.

- Developing a multinational approach to civil nuclear fuel production, phasing out the use of highly enriched uranium in civil commerce, and halting the production of fissile material for weapons.
- Enhancing verification and enforcement capabilities – and our political will to do both.
- Redoubling our efforts to resolve regional confrontations and conflicts that give rise to new nuclear powers.

We concluded that without the bold vision of world free of nuclear weapons, the actions will not be perceived as fair or urgent; and without the actions, the vision will not be perceived as realistic or possible.

Much of the reaction to our op-ed has been positive from statesmen spanning the political spectrum in Britain, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Russia. Gordon Brown and his UK government have specifically endorsed our approach.

Closer to home, during last year's presidential campaign, both then-Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain embraced this effort. President Obama in his recent speech in Prague, and Senator McCain earlier this month on the Senate floor, reaffirmed the statements of support they each made during the campaign and linked their views to the vision and steps we had espoused. In April, President Obama and Russian President Medvedev met in London and said: "We committed our two countries to achieving a nuclear [weapons] free world."

### **Questions from Critics**

There have also been critics that have challenged the approach we have put forward in the *Wall Street Journal*, in particular, our reaffirmation of the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

I am the first to admit that this goal raises a lot of hard questions, and skeptics play an important role. This subject needs study, analysis, debate and action.

Most of the criticism of our *Wall Street Journal* article has centered on the vision, although there are certainly some who oppose some of the steps like ratification of the CTBT or negotiation of a verifiable Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. Let me discuss a few of these criticisms, all of which I take seriously.

The first criticism comes from two friends I greatly admire and respect – former Defense Secretary Harold Brown and former CIA Director John Deutch. They both subscribe to most of the steps, but believe that the vision undercuts progress toward achieving those steps.

Harold and John contend that while the U.S. has ratified the Nonproliferation Treaty with its commitment to nuclear disarmament and that "no one suggests abandoning the hope

embodied in such a well intentioned statement - hope is not a policy, and, at present, there is no realistic path to a world free of nuclear weapons.”

My reply -- exactly. That is the fundamental problem with the NPT and exactly why the four of us have laid out a pathway of achievements that we believe are essential to reverse reliance on nuclear weapons globally as a vital contribution to preventing their proliferation into potentially dangerous hands, and ultimately ending them as a threat to the world.

We do not believe it is realistic today to set a date certain for abolishing all nuclear weapons. Instead, we believe that crucial steps are essential to build confidence, and that the world has to build trust, cooperation, and technical capability over many years to have a realistic prospect of ultimately ending nuclear weapons as a threat to the world. Verification and enforcement will be crucial.

I also note that since Harold and John first made this critique, a number of senior statesman and experts around the globe have enthusiastically embraced a renewed commitment to the vision of a nuclear free world. That suggests to me there is strong support abroad for the hypothesis that the vision and the steps are both essential. Of course, the vision of a nuclear-free world without steps or benchmarks has been the heart of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty for many years. That’s the problem – the vision has to be tied to the steps, but the steps also have to be tied to the vision.

A second concern -- can we preserve stability as we and other nations reduce nuclear weapons toward zero?

My reply -- adjusting U.S. and Russian strategic force postures is sure to be a complicated undertaking. But if we were smart enough at the height of the Cold War to be able to begin reducing nuclear weapons in a verifiable way, surely in the second decade after the end of the Cold War, we can find a way to expand decision time and improve stability, two possible avenues for thought.

Is prompt launch capability required for the U.S. and Russia if numbers are being reduced and survivability can be assured?

Can we find ways to increase warning and decision time by mutual steps and reduce the risk of a catastrophic accident or miscalculation as we reduce numbers? The stability question will require a lot of work as long as nuclear weapons exist.

The third critique is that there is no relationship between what the U.S. and Russia do with their nuclear stockpiles and the actions of North Korea, Iran, or, for that matter, al Qaeda.

My response -- the four of us are not saying that if Russia and the United States set a shining example that Iran and North Korea will suddenly see the light and immediately abandon their nuclear programs. That is not our point.

But we do believe that if we take this path, many more nations are likely to join us in a tough approach to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials and prevent catastrophic terrorism.

The fourth critique is the crucial long-term question of how we manage the issues associated with the “end game” of getting to zero and how we would enforce the maintenance of such a regime and deal with potential violators.

My response -- this is a “Catch 22” question, because you cannot have a complete and satisfactory answer to this question until we have taken many of the steps, and until we have proven that the world can deal effectively with both verification technology and enforcement policy and political will.

That said, near-term successes are essential as we move forward. Unless the world demonstrates that we can deal with Iran and North Korea and secure nuclear materials globally, we are not likely to make much progress on the long-term steps required to protect our security.

I do not believe that it is possible or essential to answer all of the “end game” questions with precision or complete confidence until we have real achievements. I do believe we have to acknowledge, however, that this is a question that will require the long-term and continued attention of our “best and brightest.”

To effectively deal with the end game, we will need the leadership, experience and skills of our laboratories, as well as our military leaders and policy makers and their counterparts in other nuclear nations.

### **My questions**

Now that I have made it clear that I do not pretend to have complete answers to the questions posed by the critics and skeptics, let me pose a few questions of my own.

First, how can we defend America without taking these essential steps? How can we take these steps without the cooperation of other nations? How can we get the cooperation of other nations without the vision and hope that the world will someday end these weapons as a threat to mankind? The Lou Dunn report made it clear – we can't.

Second, can deterrence work in a world with a growing number of new nuclear weapons states? How do we deal with submarines and cyber attacks?

Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were good, we were diligent, but we were also very lucky. We had more than a few close calls.

Will this skill, dedication, diligence and luck continue for decades to come, and also apply to new nuclear states in the Middle East, Northeast Asia, and South Asia?

Warren Buffett has a sobering statistic: if there is a 10 percent chance of a nuclear catastrophe in a given year, and that threat persists for 50 years, over that time frame, we have only a one-half percent chance of avoidance.

Third, what are our alternatives?

- To rely on nuclear deterrence indefinitely?
- To rely on missile defense as a total answer?
- To rely on luck or divine providence?

President Obama has made it clear that the U.S. will maintain an effective, safe and reliable deterrent as long as any country has nuclear weapons. I agree. To meet this commitment, people with differing views on the end game must work together to assure that:

- We maintain and refresh the talent pool in our laboratories and production facilities on which that deterrent depends.
- We strengthen the proficiency of those we entrust with our deployed nuclear forces.
- We build a sustainable political consensus sufficient to build a fully capable and responsive nuclear infrastructure.

It is essential to remember that the infrastructure investments required will need to be sustained over a minimum of 20 years -- a period of ten Congresses and five presidential terms. This will require the broadest possible political support that can only be achieved with presidential leadership and agreement in the Congress.

### **Conclusion**

Let me close by leaving you with this thought. Imagine that a man from Mars at some point in the future were to dig into the rubble after a nuclear catastrophe. Would he explain the devastation in the same way we explain the decline of other species: "too slow in adapting to a changing environment?" Mankind must avoid this epitaph.

We need our best minds working on these issues, both in and out of government, in every relevant field -- politics and diplomacy -- science and technology -- and others.

You have my thanks for the work you have done and encouragement to go forward with the daunting task before us.

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