



**Former Senator Sam Nunn  
Co-Chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative  
Testimony Before the  
Commission on the Prevention of Weapons  
of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism  
New York City  
September 10, 2008**

Senator Graham, Senator Talent, Members of the Commission: thank you for dedicating your time and energy to the important work of this Commission. There is no more urgent or more potentially devastating threat than an attack with a weapon of mass destruction. And yet, we are missing many of the policies and actions that could reduce the chance of an attack – and we are *continuing* some policies and actions that could increase that chance.

A comprehensive review of our efforts to protect the country against a nuclear, biological or chemical weapons attack is deeply needed. The 9/11 commission was wise to recommend this review, and the Congress was wise to establish it. You all are doing a great public service by accepting this role. I am pleased to offer you my sense of the nuclear dangers we face and what we must do to address them.

Any sound strategy of national defense must be built around an effort to reduce the greatest threats. This requires not just understanding that the greatest threat we face is a nuclear attack, but also understanding the many ways in which a nuclear attack might come about – and the trends that increase the likelihood.

We have important efforts underway to reduce nuclear danger and some important successes, including the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, the Global Threat Reduction Initiative, the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. These all mark progress and potential, but the risk of a nuclear weapon being used today is growing, not receding. The storm clouds are gathering:

- Terrorists are seeking nuclear weapons, and there can be little doubt that if they acquire a weapon that they will use it.
- There are nuclear weapons materials in more than 40 countries, some secured by nothing more than a chain link fence, and, at the current pace, it will be decades before this material is adequately secured or eliminated globally.

- The know-how and expertise to build nuclear weapons is far more available today because of an explosion of information and commerce throughout the world.
- The number of nuclear weapons states is increasing. A world with 12 or 20 nuclear weapons states will be immeasurably more dangerous than today's world and make it more likely that weapons or materials to make them will fall into the hands of terrorists with no return address. Developments in cyberterrorism pose new threats that could have disastrous consequences if the command-and-control systems of any nuclear-weapons state are compromised.
- With the growing interest in nuclear energy, a number of countries are considering developing the capacity to enrich uranium to use as fuel for nuclear energy, but this would also give them the capacity to move quickly to a nuclear weapons program if they chose to do so.
- Meanwhile, the United States and Russia continue to deploy thousands of nuclear weapons on ballistic missiles that can hit their targets in less than 30 minutes, encouraging both sides to continue a prompt launch capability that carries with it an increasingly unacceptable risk of an accidental, mistaken or unauthorized launch. Though we are certainly not approaching the confrontational dangers of the Cold War era, any military tensions between the United States and Russia increase the risk of accidents or mistakes.

The bottom line: The world is heading in a very dangerous direction. Both leaders and citizens here and abroad must reflect on what is at stake.

If Al Qaeda had hit the trade towers with a small crude nuclear weapon instead of two airplanes, a fireball would have vaporized everything in the vicinity. Lower Manhattan and the financial district would be ash and rubble. Tens of thousands of people would have been killed instantly. Those who survived would have been left with no shelter, no clean water, no safe food, and no medical attention. Telecommunications, utilities, transportation, and rescue services would be thrown into chaos.

That would have been just the physical impact. If you were trying to draw a circle to mark the overall impact of the blast – in social, economic, and security terms -- the circle would be the equator itself. No part of the planet would escape the impact. People everywhere would fear another blast. Travel, international trade, capital flows and commerce would initially stop, and many freedoms we have come to take for granted would quickly be eroded in the name of security. The confidence of America and the world would be shaken to the core.

The threat of a nuclear attack is a real and present danger, and yet we are doing an insufficient job in defending against this new threat. Today:

- The risk of an intentional nuclear war between Russia and the United States is much lower;
- The threat of an accidental or unauthorized nuclear launch continues;
- The threat of a nuclear attack - deliberate or by mistake - has increased since India, Pakistan and North Korea developed their arsenal and since Iran has embarked on its nuclear program; and
- A terrorist nuclear attack is more likely because of the wide availability of nuclear weapons materials, the growing number of nuclear powers, and the spread of nuclear technology and knowledge.

These dangers are threats that every country faces, and no country can defeat on its own.

We are in a race between cooperation and catastrophe.

### **The Vision of Ending this Threat to the World**

With growing nuclear dangers and stakes in mind, George Shultz, Bill Perry, Henry Kissinger and I published an op-ed in January 2007 in *The Wall Street Journal* that called for a different direction for our global nuclear policy with both vision and steps to immediately begin to reduce nuclear dangers.

The threats have changed. We need new strategies. We need to change direction to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and ultimately end them as a threat to the world.

The four of us, and the many other former security leaders who have joined us, are keenly aware that the quest for a nuclear weapons free world is fraught with practical and political challenges. As *The Economist* magazine wisely said in 2006: “By simply demanding the goal of a world without nuclear weapons without a readiness to tackle the practical problems raised by it ensures that it will never happen.”

I believe that one of the best ways to describe the threat – at least from my perspective – is to lay out a few of the imperative steps we must take to reduce the threat.

We have taken aim at the “practical problems” by laying out a series of steps that we believe constitute the urgent new actions for reducing the nuclear dangers and lay the groundwork for building a world free of the nuclear threat.

We must:

- Change nuclear force postures in the United States and Russia to greatly increase warning time and ease our fingers away from the nuclear trigger.
- Reduce substantially nuclear forces in all states that possess them.

- Move toward developing cooperative multilateral ballistic-missile defense and early warning systems, which will reduce tensions over defensive systems and enhance the possibility of progress in other areas.
- Eliminate short-range “tactical” nuclear weapons – beginning with accountability and transparency between the United States, NATO and Russia.
- Bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force – in the United States and in other key states.
- Secure nuclear weapons and materials around the world to the highest standards.
- Develop a multinational approach to civil nuclear fuel production, phase out the use of highly enriched uranium in civil commerce, and halt the production of fissile material for weapons.
- Enhance verification and enforcement capabilities. We must build the international political will first to deter and when necessary to strongly and effectively respond to countries that breach their commitments.
- Redouble efforts to resolve the regional confrontations that increase demand for nuclear weapons.
- Intensive work with leaders of the countries in possession of nuclear weapons to turn the goal of a world without nuclear weapons into a joint enterprise.

Each step will help reverse the spread of nuclear weapons. Each step will reduce the risk of nuclear use. Each step will inspire greater cooperation. And each step will help build a foundation of cooperation and trust – among the United States, Russia and China, and all nuclear weapons states. Each step backward – for instance, the recent Russia-Georgia conflict as well as the lack of any apparent progress on U.S.- Russia missile defense cooperation -- makes the job harder and longer, but also more essential.

At NTI, the organization I co-chair, we have been working on all of these steps through our words and actions. I would like to mention two NTI projects in particular that could make a real difference and that we have a real chance of accomplishing.

The first is aimed at increasing security for nuclear materials through the creation of the World Institute of Nuclear Security to bring government and industry together to share best practices and increase security for nuclear materials. We have worked on this concept for several years and hope to stand up this organization in the months ahead.

The second is to help ensure that the growth of nuclear power does not increase nuclear weapons proliferation dangers. With the generous financial backing of Warren Buffett, NTI put up the first \$50 million to create a \$150 million international nuclear

fuel bank that could serve as a last resort fuel reserve to support nations that make the sovereign choice not to build indigenous nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. With nearly \$50 million in contributions from the United States government, \$10 million from the United Arab Emirates and \$5 million from the Government of Norway, there is approximately a \$35 million gap remaining. With the growing global interest in expanding the use of nuclear power, it is imperative that there be multiple levels of assurances for fuel supply so that the technology to make nuclear weapons material is not spread to dozens of countries around the world.

### **No Security Without Cooperation; No Cooperation Without Non-Nuclear Vision -- The Core Argument**

Strategic cooperation must become the cornerstone of our national defense against nuclear weapons. This is not because cooperation gives us a warm feeling of community, but because every other method will fail.

I have concluded that we cannot defend America without taking these steps; we cannot take these steps without the cooperation of other nations; we cannot get the cooperation of other nations without the vision and hope of a world that will someday end these weapons of mass destruction as a threat to the world.

I also believe that this same logic applies to other nations around the world. The use of a nuclear weapon anywhere will affect every nation everywhere. The vision and actions must go together. Without the bold vision, the actions will not be perceived as fair or urgent. Without the actions, the vision will not be perceived as realistic or possible.

This will be a challenging process that must be accomplished in stages. The United States must keep its nuclear weapons as long as other nations do. But we will be safer, and the world will be safer, if we are working toward the goal of deemphasizing nuclear weapons and keeping them out of dangerous hands -- and ultimately ridding our world of them.

The good news is that more and more world leaders now seem to understand that the current trends are leading to an extremely dangerous world.

- We have seen this recognition in a meeting this past February hosted by the government of Norway that gathered more than 100 participants from 29 countries.
- We have seen it in the commitment of the government of the United Kingdom.
- We have seen it in Russia with the constructive words of Foreign Minister Lavrov, former Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and former Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.
- And we are seeing it here in the United States, where 17 of the 24 former Secretaries of Defense and State and National Security Advisors spanning

nine Administrations are supporting the vision of a world free from nuclear weapons and the steps needed to move in that direction.

- We have seen it in op-eds written by senior statesmen from across party lines in the United Kingdom and Italy to advance the vision and steps for a nuclear weapons free world.
- Encouragingly, Senator McCain and Senator Obama have both expressed support for working toward a world without nuclear weapons and taking steps that move us in that direction.

Our next President most likely will enter office with no high-level position established for coordinating efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism or to prevent terrorism by other means of mass destruction. The Departments of Defense, State, Justice, Homeland Security and Energy, and the intelligence services, all have *some* responsibility for preventing nuclear terrorism, but they each have different pieces of the equation, and these pieces have proved exceedingly difficult to coordinate. The Department of Commerce, with its export control responsibility, should probably be a part of every equation. To say that all of these departments and agencies have trouble playing well together would be an understatement.

I believe that until there is a senior official with direct access to the President who has specific and singular responsibility for coordinating the efforts to keep nuclear weapons out of terrorist hands, we will not get the action we need.

This idea isn't new. We at NTI have advanced it for seven years. The 9/11 Commission recommended this be done. A bill calling for a senior official to coordinate our collective efforts was passed by Congress and was signed by the President on August 3, 2007. It's the law. But it's not enough to have a law. That appointment has yet to be made – more than a year after the law took effect.

The Office of the President needs to set priorities, assign responsibilities, ensure resources, and hold people accountable. In the case of the “coordinator,” this President could put such capacity in place with a single stroke, but disputes over Constitutional prerogatives sadly will probably leave it to the next President.

### **The First Steps in the Ascent**

This is not, however, just about setting an example. It is about our own security and survival. We in America should ask ourselves a long overdue question: 17 years after the Cold War, how can it be in the United States' national security interest for the President of Russia to have only a few minutes to decide whether to fire his nuclear weapons or lose them in response to what could be a false warning? I would hope that this question would be asked in reverse in Russia. I have posed this question to both Presidents Bush and Putin in person in the past year. It is my hope that the United States and Russia will begin to ask this question together and over time other nuclear nations will join in this exercise in survival.

If together we increase warning time -- making nuclear weapons less relevant -- and at the same time reduce our numbers of weapons — it will strengthen our fight against the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear materials. This is not because our example is likely to inspire Iran, North Korea or al Qaeda to say “we have seen the light,” but because many more nations will be willing to join us in a firm and vigorous approach to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials and prevent catastrophic terrorism.

### **The Mountaintop**

The reaction of many people to the vision and steps to eliminate the nuclear threat comes in two parts – on the one hand they say “that would be great.” And their second thought is: “We can never get there.” To me, the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is like the top of a very tall mountain. It is tempting and easy to say: “We can’t get there from here.” It is true that today in our troubled world we can’t see the top of the mountain. But we can see that we are heading down -- not up. We can see that we must turn around, that we must take paths leading to higher ground and that we must get others to move with us. We must find trails leading upward. Once we get to higher ground there will remain serious obstacles between us and the top. We must develop ironclad verification procedures and assurances for monitoring and enforcing a prohibition on nuclear weapons. We must be able to respond quickly and decisively to any attempt to cheat. Today it is very apparent that our capability to detect and respond needs considerable strengthening, including rebuilding the confidence of our allies and friends in the accuracy and objectivity of U.S. intelligence. Both the good and bad news is that, given the big steps required to move upward, we have time to work on the transition from higher ground to the top. It is not too soon to begin.

### **A Parable of Hope**

Let me close with a parable of hope. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the United States began assisting Russia’s work to dismantle Soviet nuclear missiles and warheads, our countries struck a deal called the U.S.–Russian Highly Enriched Uranium Purchase Agreement.

Under this agreement, which is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, 500 tons of highly enriched uranium from former Soviet nuclear weapons is being blended down to low enriched uranium, and then used as fuel for nuclear power plants in the United States. Shipments began in 1995 and will continue through 2013. When you calculate that 20% of all electricity in the U.S. comes from nuclear power plants, and 50% of the nuclear fuel used in the U.S. comes from Russia through the HEU Agreement, you have an interesting fact: roughly speaking – one out of every ten light bulbs in America today is powered by material that was in Soviet nuclear warheads pointed at us a few years ago.

From swords to ploughshares. Who would have thought this possible in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s? It would have certainly been seen as a mountain too high to climb.

Nearly 20 years ago, President Reagan asked an audience to imagine that “all of us discovered that we were threatened by a power from outer space—from another planet.” The President then asked: “Wouldn't we come together to fight that particular threat?” After letting that image sink in for a moment, President Reagan came to his point: “We now have a weapon that can destroy the world -- why don't we recognize that threat more clearly and then come together with one aim in mind: how safely, sanely, and quickly can we rid the world of this threat to our civilization and our existence.” If we want our children and grandchildren to ever see the mountaintop, our generation must begin to answer this question.

Senator Graham and Members of the Commission: I thank you again for your dedication to this cause. I am eager to help in any way I can. I look forward to your report, and I urge you to speak frequently and passionately about your findings and recommendations – especially in the early part of next year, when the new Congress and the new President have a chance to make real change in our nuclear policy and enhance the security of our country and our world.

###