

Nuclear Weapons: Where Do We Go From Here?

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Background

34 years military service

Much of it commanding tactical nuclear weapons capable Army units

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In the six decades and more since the advent of atomic power and the use of a nuclear weapon to destroy, much water has gone over the proverbial dam. From a perceived need to use a new, dangerous, and provocative weapon to defeat a dangerous and hostile enemy of the day, through a Cold War of epic proportions in which the result showed uncommon restraint among the great powers, to a later time when the nuclear genie is now out of the bottle and the proliferation of nuclear weapons capable of mass destruction is a real and constant threat, the United States has been confronted with a continuing debate over the utility, morality, danger, and ultimate disposition of these devices.

When we consider alternative strategies, weapons systems, and changes in national policy, I strongly believe that our overriding priority must be the security, safety, and defense of the United States. With this in mind, I am convinced that we can no longer rely on our possession of nuclear weapons to satisfy this priority.

Whatever the rationale for the development and use of nuclear weapons in the 1940's and whatever the rationale for the buildup of nuclear weapons capabilities in the ensuing years, we are faced today with the results of such development and use.

The nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States was joined by three other global powers when nuclear weapons were seen as the ultimate threat, the *sine qua non* of military power. Later, other states --- regional powers --- followed the reasoning and lead of existing nuclear-armed states to create their own nuclear arsenal in the hope that deterrence theory would apply to them also.

Providentially, no nuclear weapons have been used during this period. However, their continued proliferation even to the very end of the 20th Century and perhaps beyond has itself become its own threat to world peace. It is true that predictions of two decades ago that by the close of the century nuclear weapons would be in the hands of perhaps twenty states have not come true. But the rise of terrorist groups and other non-state entities that see profit in the possession of nuclear devices has weakened if not destroyed the fundamental assumption that nuclear weapons in the hands of responsible major states would somehow deter their use and provide ultimate international stability.

We can take pride in some positive actions that the United States, the Russian Federation, and other successor states of the Soviet Union have taken to reduce the danger of nuclear weapons themselves and curtail their proliferation.

--- arms reduction agreements (INF, START I, and SORT)

--- Nunn-Lugar

--- Lab-to-Lab exchanges between Russian and US nuclear R&D and production facilities.

--- Cooperative efforts to deal with new proliferants and potential proliferants of nuclear explosive material.

But, we must do more if we are to reduce the chances of further nuclear proliferation:

--- We must increase communication and thoughtful negotiation with the Russian Federation to identify additional areas of cooperation.

--- As a priority, we must enhance, reinforce, and fund the Nunn-Lugar initiatives and expand them to third countries. Call upon Russia to make this a truly cooperative effort to include joint funding of new initiatives.

---We should review the present need for nuclear arsenals on all sides and reduce them to the lowest level possible in the shortest period of time, recognizing that international stability during the process is a key goal. Recent studies suggest that reduction to no more than one thousand deployed weapons is reasonably achievable now. If deterrence of a potentially hostile Russian Federation is the sole goal of such an arsenal, then it seems to me that an equal number far lower than that figure would be possible in the not-too-distant future.

---We must recognize that the potential use of a nuclear weapon by any state or entity would be seriously destabilizing. This means that the United States and Russia must look elsewhere for ways to defeat hardened targets...

--- While nuclear arsenals are being reduced, we must insure that the maintenance, remanufacture, or replacement of nuclear weapons is accomplished as publicly as possible given security concerns to insure that there are no misinterpretations or surprises.

--- Consider the continued removal of deployed nuclear weapons from alert status and place more distance between a potentially threatening event and the need to even consider the use of a nuclear weapon.

To say that we live in a dangerous and complex world is a masterpiece of understatement. The very existence of weapons of mass destruction requires that nations act with thoughtful restraint. Of course, we cannot anticipate that all will do that; thus, it is imperative that we are prepared to defend ourselves if necessary and to deter others with hostile intent against us if possible. To what degree nuclear weapons can be credited with the perceived stability of the Cold War period we cannot really say. Terrorist entities today are hard to deter. Some rogue states may misguidedly believe that they have little or nothing to lose in a nuclear exchange.

What we do know is that it is essential to reduce nuclear arsenals worldwide and prevent their further proliferation to provide for future stability and eventually to divert resources to pressing problems whose solution is the only long-term way to insure stability in the face of terror. **I support this resolution because I believe it is a major step in this direction.**