



The Race Between Cooperation and Catastrophe

Lecture by Senator Samuel A. Nunn

**The American Academy in Berlin
Berlin, Germany
June 12, 2008**

At the dawn of the nuclear age -- after the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki-- General Omar Bradley said in a speech:

“The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom...We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”

It might surprise General Bradley, if he were alive today, to know that we have made it 60 years without a nuclear attack. Thousands of men and women worked diligently on both sides of the Iron Curtain to prevent nuclear war, to avoid overreacting to false warnings and to reduce risk.

We were good, we were diligent, but we were also very lucky. We had more than a few close calls. By far, the most dangerous was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. However, there were a number of other “edge of disaster” moments on both sides during the Cold War.

Making it through 60 years without a nuclear attack should not make us complacent. If we’re to continue to avoid a catastrophe, all nuclear powers will have to be highly capable, careful, competent, rational -- and if things go wrong, lucky -- every single time. India and Pakistan have already had more than one close call, and their nuclear age has just begun.

We do have important efforts underway 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.

The bottom line: The world is heading in a very dangerous direction.

With these growing dangers in mind, former U.S. Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Bill Perry and I published an op-ed in January 2007, and a follow-up piece in 2008, in *The Wall Street Journal* that called for a different direction for our global nuclear policy with both vision and steps.

The four of us, and the many other 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."

We have taken aim at the practical problems by linking the vision of a nuclear-free world with a series of steps for reducing nuclear dangers and carving a path towards a world free of the nuclear threat.

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.

We don't believe our example is likely to inspire Iran, North Korea or al Qaeda to drop their weapons ambitions, but we believe it would become more likely that many more nations will join us in a firm approach to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials and prevent catastrophic terrorism.

I believe that we cannot defend ourselves against the nuclear threats facing the world today 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 as a threat to mankind.

This will be a challenging process that must be accomplished in stages. The United States must keep 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.

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

Indeed, even a quick glance at the steps we are proposing in our two *Wall Street Journal* essays reveals that none of the steps can be accomplished by the United States and our close allies alone:

- Changing nuclear force postures in the United States and Russia to greatly increase warning 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 which 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.
- Building an international consensus behind ways to deter and, when necessary, strongly and effectively respond to countries that breach their commitments.

The most difficult and challenging step is the need for redoubling our efforts to resolve regional confrontations and conflicts that give rise to new nuclear powers. The obvious candidates here can be found readily in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. We also must urgently address security concerns that give existing nuclear powers the reasons or excuses to keep their nuclear weapons operationally on the front burner, which in turn cause much of the world to believe that we are not living up to our Nonproliferation Treaty commitments.

There can be no coherent, effective security strategy to reduce nuclear dangers that does not take into account Russia – its strengths, weaknesses, aims and ambitions. So, it is remarkable -- and dangerous – that the United States, Russia and NATO have not developed an answer to one of the most fundamental security questions we face: What is the long-term role for Russia in the EuroAtlantic arc? Whether caused by the absence of vision, a lack of political will, or nostalgia for the Cold War, the failure of both sides to forge a mutually beneficial and durable security relationship marks a collective failure of leadership in Washington, European capitals and Moscow.

During the Cold War, the United States spent trillions of dollars containing communism and preserving freedom. Our European allies – particularly Germany – devoted a large portion of territory and national treasure for the same purpose. While the cost was immense, it paid off. We preserved freedom, and we avoided a war which could have escalated to a nuclear holocaust. In our military defense of Western Europe, NATO was one of the most successful alliances in history. Our alliance members shared the same security goals, and we all were dedicated to containing communism, even though we were not all democracies. We had a clear perspective of our vital interests and were able, for more than 40 years, to give priority to these interests over other concerns that were often in the headlines, but not vital.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson was once asked – “How would you define foreign policy?” His reply – “just one damn thing after another.” German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that the most common form of human stupidity is forgetting what one is trying to do. NATO today faces one damn thing after another – but unlike the Cold War it seems that we are not quite sure what it is we are trying to do. We have not developed a sustainable post-Cold War security concept for NATO.

NATO operations in Afghanistan are crucial to the future of Afghanistan and to the security and credibility of NATO, but success is doubtful without a larger economic, political and military effort. NATO has many important priorities, but I believe the priority that must be at the top of our list is to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction and prevent catastrophic terrorism by keeping dangerous nuclear weapons material out of the hands of terrorists.

If we are to be successful in dealing with the hydra-headed threats of emerging new nuclear weapons states, proliferation of enrichment, poorly secured nuclear material and catastrophic terrorism – many nations must cooperate. We must recognize, however, that these tasks are virtually impossible without the cooperation of Russia. It is abundantly clear that Russia itself faces these same threats and that its own security is dependent on cooperation with NATO and the United States.

Russia’s erosion of conventional military capability has led it to increase dependency on nuclear weapons, including tactical battlefield nuclear weapons. And now Russia has declared – as NATO did during the Cold War -- that it may use nuclear weapons first.

Welcome to the end of the Cold War – battlefield nukes are still in vogue and for the first time, both Russia and NATO have reserved the right to use nuclear weapons first, even if not attacked with nuclear weapons. Together, are we inadvertently and unthinkingly headed “back to the future?”

Winston Churchill once said – “however beautiful the strategy – you must occasionally look at the result.” I believe that NATO, the United States and Russia must look at both the trajectory and the results of our current policies.

As NATO prepares for its 60th anniversary, we must address a fundamental question. In the years ahead, does NATO want Russia to be inside or outside the Euro-Atlantic security arc? The same question, of course, must be asked by the Russians. If our answer is outside, then it’s simple -- we both just keep doing what we are now doing. If the answer is inside, we and Russia must make adjustments in strategy and tactics informed by answering, at least, the following questions:

1. From a NATO and U.S. perspective -- is early entry of additional members to the alliance more important than gaining Russia's cooperation on reducing clear and present nuclear risks – including preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear state? On this point, I believe that Chancellor Merkel was wise in insisting that NATO “stop, look and listen” before further expansion.
2. From NATO's perspective, does the expansion of membership to distant states obligate us to incur enormous increases in defense budgets or be forever committed to Cold War concepts of deterrence, including the possible first use of nuclear weapons? Are we really examining the security implications of expansion over the long term or has this become primarily a political exercise?
3. From a Russian perspective, is it wise to keep pressuring its neighbors so they hurry to join the strongest alliance available today – in the form of NATO? Ratcheting up the pressure in various ways on Ukraine or Georgia does not encourage those countries to work with Moscow. Instead, it drives them to seek NATO's protection. Is this what Russia really wants?
4. Can the West, which stood together coherently and tenaciously during the entire Cold War, manage to clearly stand for rule of law and human rights today without giving the Russian people the impression that we are lecturing as if we have all the answers? Can we accept Henry Kissinger's advice to avoid the “American tendency to insist on global tutelage” while we work on crucial issues with Russia that affect the security of the United States and our close allies?
5. Can Russia avoid the temptation to employ its emerging energy superpower status to achieve political ends? Will it become a reliable and responsible market participant following the rule of law?
6. Are we and Russia destined to continue the assumption that Russia will always be outside the Euro-Atlantic security arc?

The common interest of United States, Europe, Russia, China, Japan, and many other nations are more aligned today than at any point in modern history. I believe that we must seize this historic opportunity and act accordingly.

Bottom line: In an age fraught with the dangers of nuclear proliferation and catastrophic terrorism, global security depends on regional security. Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, establishing a more cooperative and productive relationship with Russia will require Europe's leadership as well as the United States'. Historically, Germany has been at the center of the NATO alliance; today, Germany can play a unique bridge-building role in encouraging NATO and Russia to begin to ask and answer these questions.

The use of a nuclear weapon anywhere will affect every nation everywhere. 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.

Nearly 20 years ago, U.S. President Ronald 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.

Remarks:

Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

The Author:

*Former Senator **Samuel A. Nunn** is Co-Chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a charitable organization working to reduce the global threats from nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. He served as a United States Senator from Georgia from 1972 to 1996, and formerly worked at the law firm of King & Spalding. Senator Nunn studied at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Emory University, and Emory Law School. He is currently a distinguished professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech, and is chairman of the board of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC.*