

**Charles B. Curtis
President
Nuclear Threat Initiative**

“A New Basis for Optimism”

Before the

**Participants in the NPT Preparatory Committee for the
2010 Review Conference**

May 2, 2008

Geneva

Thank you very much for using your limited free time, here in Geneva, to join us today.

We have asked you here to consider with us how to capitalize on the opportunity that could be provided at the 2010 NPT Review Conference if – *as we at the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) think is possible* – the 2010 RevCon takes place against a sharply more positive backdrop than any of us had thought possible.

As we gather in May 2008, we have to acknowledge that the NPT regime is in trouble, with rising tension between the nuclear haves and have-nots.

The Treaty is suffering under the strain of trying to hold together under one regime two incompatible sets of principles – applying the more permissive standard to one group of countries, and a much more restrictive standard to another and failing to draw the distinction according to any standard that the world at large could be persuaded is just.

It was known forty years ago that such an arrangement could only be temporary, and that any attempt to make that distinction permanent would bring the collapse of the Treaty. So now as we approach 2010, it's become ever more clear, not just in theory, but in the reality we see in our world, either the nuclear weapons states begin to bring their arsenals sharply down, or the Treaty is in danger of collapse, or irrelevance. And, importantly, the cooperation upon which the world depends to address nuclear dangers will be withheld.

I think most people agree with this premise, which is why many are pessimistic about the nuclear future and the future of the Treaty. In fact, we at NTI agree with the premise, but we are somewhat optimistic about the future of the Treaty – because I think

that the long-sought, serious, reductions leading to disarmament have now become a real possibility – and the revival of the nonproliferation consensus is today possible in a way it was not in each of the PrepComs which have followed the permanent extension of the NPT.

In January of last year, former U.S. Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Sam Nunn – all highly respected senior statesmen of US national security policy – published an essay in the *Wall Street Journal* that called for a different direction for US nuclear policy.

They wrote that the world is on a precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era. The likelihood that non-state terrorists will get nuclear weapons is increasing, and they are conceptually outside the bounds of a deterrent strategy.

They note that the NPT calls for weapons states to divest their nuclear weapons over time, and that non-weapons states have grown increasingly skeptical of the sincerity of this commitment by the nuclear powers.

In their words: “... leadership will be required to take the world to the next stage -- to a solid consensus for reversing 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.”

They called for “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”

They then laid out steps for reducing the nuclear threat. Steps would include actions:

- To change the Cold War posture of deployed nuclear weapons to increase warning and decision time to reduce pressure on the nuclear trigger and thereby reduce the danger of an accidental or unauthorized use of a nuclear weapon.
- To reduce substantially the size of nuclear forces in all states that possess them.
- To eliminate short-range nuclear weapons designed to be forward-deployed.
- To initiate a process to achieve ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and work with other states to bring it into force.
- To provide the highest possible standards of security for all stocks of weapons, weapons-usable plutonium, and highly enriched uranium everywhere in the world.

- To develop better control of the operation and distribution of fuel cycle facilities.
- To halt the production of fissile material for weapons globally; phasing out the use of highly enriched uranium in civil commerce and removing weapons-usable uranium from research facilities around the world and rendering the materials safe.
- To redouble our efforts to resolve regional confrontations and conflicts that give rise to new nuclear powers or nuclear weapons ambitions.

They closed the piece by saying: “We endorse setting the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and working energetically on the actions required to achieve that goal.” They acknowledged that “without the bold vision [of a world free of nuclear weapons], the actions will not be perceived as fair or urgent. Without the actions, the vision will not be perceived as realistic or possible.”

If such a course were embraced, it would be a startling turnaround on nuclear weapons policy for the United States – and just the kind of move that could bring the world fully together behind an effort to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and prevent them from falling into terrorist hands.

A surge of support among US experts of wide-ranging backgrounds immediately followed: from advisors to Republican and Democratic Presidents, to a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to prominent leaders of President Reagan’s arms negotiation teams.

The Project has gained support from more than two-thirds of the living former secretaries of state, secretaries of defense and national security advisors. These include: Madeleine Albright, Richard V. Allen, James A. Baker III, Samuel R. Berger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Frank Carlucci, Warren Christopher, William Cohen, Lawrence Eagleburger, Melvin Laird, Anthony Lake, Robert McFarlane, Robert McNamara and Colin Powell.

The op-ed has already succeeded in creating greater political space for people from across party lines and across national boundaries to think about these issues.

This opinion piece led to the birth of the Nuclear Security Project (NSP). The NSP will be guided by all four authors, with NTI coordinating the work of the principals and managing the implementation of the Project. The project is designed to galvanize governments to rethink their policies, to change direction, and to take the steps that will reduce the risk of a nuclear weapon being used. We will pursue these goals with direct outreach to governments and to the key people who shape the thinking and action and governments – security experts, academic leaders, business leaders, and the media.

In addition to this outreach, we will produce a film, organize an international consortium of think tanks and policy institutes, host several conferences, and launch public education efforts in the US and around the world – all with the goal of generating support for the vision and steps toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

NTI is especially cognizant that this must be a global effort, not just an American initiative. There are ten nationalities represented on our Board. From the outset, we have organized our endeavors to engage all nations in threat reduction activities. NTI is also keenly aware that the views recently expressed by the American statesmen are not new. The vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and steps to advance the vision have been voiced by a number of states and statesmen represented in this room. Indeed the vision of a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons is enshrined in the NPT.

So what is different here and what lies at the root of my optimism? First, what is different is not so much what has been said, but who has said it. When Shultz, Nunn, Kissinger and Perry called for a nuclear weapons free world, the call, according to the *New York Times* “sent waves” through the U.S. foreign policy establishment.” In fact, these waves have already circled the globe and carried us to Oslo and London – as you will hear -- and now to Geneva. Later this year, we hope to spread the initiative to Asia and continue our world-wide consultations.

Among the most satisfying expressions of support for the vision in the Wall Street Journal piece comes from another group of US politicians. But these politicians of the second group are not retired from public service; they are very active in it. In fact, they are all running for President of the United States.

In response to the Kissinger, Perry, Nunn, Shultz vision and steps toward a world free of nuclear weapons,

Senator Obama has said:

“More nuclear weapons and more nuclear-armed nations mean more danger to us all. Here's what I'll say as President: “America seeks a world in which there are no nuclear weapons....We'll work with Russia to take U.S. and Russian ballistic missiles off hair-trigger alert, and to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material.”

Senator Clinton has said:

The United States must lead a global effort to reduce the terrible dangers of nuclear weapons and to move toward the goal, shared by every President from Truman to Clinton, of one day ending nuclear weapons. I endorse the vision set out by Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, Bill Perry, and George Shultz of a world without nuclear weapons and their idea of taking practical steps toward that vision.

Senator McCain has said:

“We should work to reduce nuclear arsenals all around the world, starting with our own. Forty years ago, the five declared nuclear powers came together in support of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and pledged to end the arms race and move toward

nuclear disarmament. The time has come to renew that commitment. We do not need all the weapons currently in our arsenal. The United States should lead a global effort at nuclear disarmament consistent with our vital interests and the cause of peace. ...”

One of these three individuals will be President of the United States when the NPT review conference meets in 2010.

Imagine if the next U.S. President declared shortly after the election that he or she would work purposefully and conscientiously with other nations to bring about a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons and then took concrete, practical steps to advance that vision while meaningfully reducing nuclear danger. :

Imagine also that the non-nuclear weapons states responded by working more purposefully and conscientiously to address proliferation concerns on a regional and global basis. Imagine that these collective actions became mutually reinforcing and momentum built from the mutual trust and restored confidence.

Imagine out of these steps, we are able to restore the hope for a safer world where the benefits of the atom are secured for all and all are made secure from the atom’s destructive potential. That’s where we started when the NPT was formed years ago. It’s time to complete the journey and to bring about a security context that will make it all possible.

As in some areas of the globe, where the ice melts briefly once a year – in the world of nuclear weapons policy, perhaps only once a generation, certain policies long frozen become fluid and can take new shape. If we grasp this passing chance, we can reshape the world and make it safer for present and future generations.

Thank you.