

**Sam Nunn**

**Moving Away from Doomsday and Other Dangers:**

**The Need to Think Anew**

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My greatest privilege as a senator was to focus on the security interests of our nation and to work closely with our men and women in uniform to strengthen our defenses. Increasingly, in my years as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, that meant working to respond to the emerging dangers of the post-Cold War period.

Today, I am pleased to have the chance to share my thoughts with members of the Press Club and guests, as I renew my personal commitment to the cause of threat reduction through my work with the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

Supported by the generosity of Ted Turner, and guided by a distinguished board that Ted and I co-chair, the Nuclear Threat Initiative is a new foundation dedicated to reducing the global threat from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Our job is to increase public awareness, encourage dialogue, catalyze action, and promote new thinking about these dangers in this country and abroad. It is this last point—the need to think anew—that I want to emphasize today.

Ten years ago, just after President Gorbachev was released from house arrest following the failed coup, a U.S. senator on an official visit to Moscow met with him in his Kremlin office, and asked him directly if he had retained command and control of the Soviet nuclear forces during the coup attempt. President Gorbachev did not answer, and that was answer enough. I was that senator.

The Soviet empire was coming apart. I was optimistic that this breakup would expand freedom and reduce the risk of global war, but I left Moscow in the early fall of 1991 convinced that it would also present a whole new set of dangers. Over the next two months, I formed a partnership with Senator Dick Lugar, Senator Pete Domenici, Senator Carl Levin, Senator John Warner, Senator Jeff Bingaman and others to address these new threats to our security. In the ten years since, much has been done, but the dangers persist and in some cases have increased. Let's take a look at a few events.

- In 1994 in Prague, authorities confiscated 2.7 kilograms of extremely potent nuclear bomb-making material.
- In 1995, Russian early warning systems initially misinterpreted a peaceful U.S. research rocket launch from Norway, which activated President Yeltsin's nuclear briefcase, and set in motion Russian procedures for a nuclear response.
- In the spring of 1995, members of the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo launched a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway. Before their organization was broken up, they were actively recruiting Russian scientists and also were working to develop biological weapons and to obtain the Ebola virus.
- In the spring of 1998, India and Pakistan, two countries that have fought three recent wars, exploded nuclear tests within days of each other. Both nations now have nuclear weapons; neither has sophisticated warning or safety systems, and there is a continuing insurgency along their shared border.

- In 1998, an employee at a Russian nuclear weapons laboratory was arrested trying to sell nuclear weapons designs to agents of Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Throughout the 1990s, thousands of Russian weapons scientists saw their jobs cut or wages slashed, and thousands responsible for the security of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and materials went months without pay.
- During this period, Iranian intelligence officers began making recruiting trips to Russia, offering biological weapons scientists many times their pay to move to Iran.
- In 1999, terrorist Usama Bin Laden, said: "To seek to possess the weapons that could counter those of the infidels is a religious duty."
- In our new century, this increased interest in acquiring nuclear weapons is matched by increased access to information. Today anyone with a computer and a modem can find rudimentary instructions for building a nuclear weapon on the Internet.

These are known events. The larger danger lies in what we don't know.

As we enter the second decade of the post-Cold War world, let me repeat a statement often made, but too often not heard. The most significant, clear and present danger to the national security of the United States is the threat posed by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Nothing else comes close. The public perception of the threat is low; the reality of the threat is high. There is a dangerous gap between the threat and our response. To close this gap, we must make a fundamental shift in the way we think about nuclear weapons, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and our national security.

A story told by my humorous friend former Senator Alan Simpson helps make the point: Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine, they crawled into their tent and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his friend: Watson, look up and tell me what you see. Watson replied: I see millions and millions of stars. What does that tell you Watson, asked Holmes. Watson pondered a minute and replied—astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. What does it tell you, Holmes? Holmes was silent for a moment, then spoke. Watson, you idiot, someone has stolen our tent!

Those of us whose thinking was shaped during the Cold War are, like Watson, in danger of missing the obvious. We can become so attached to what we know that we miss what's new. As the whole world has changed, threats have changed. When threats change, our strategy and our tactics must change. It is time to think anew.

Two months ago, a new president took office. One of the first rites of initiation for any new president is to receive a briefing on the nuclear war plan. If you will permit me a moment of poetic license, I would like to suggest what a military briefer could have said in such a briefing to the president:

- Our primary mission, Mr. President, is to deter a nuclear attack against the U.S. and our allies. This mission has remained essentially unchanged for the last 50 years.
- Our deterrence strategy depends on the unquestioned ability of our nuclear weapons to survive a massive Russian nuclear strike, and still to be able to retaliate with enough force to destroy Russia, literally and absolutely.
- To support this strategy, the United States maintains more than 2,000 nuclear weapons on high alert, ready to launch within minutes. So does Russia.

- Once launched, we have no capacity to divert missiles or destroy them in flight. Neither does Russia.
- Mr. President, Russia can no longer afford to keep most of its submarines at sea or its land-based missiles mobile and invulnerable.
- This reduces Russia's confidence that its nuclear weapons can survive a first strike and makes it more likely Russia will launch its weapons not after an attack, but after the mere warning of an attack.
- Russia's early warning system has eroded dangerously, and this increases the chance that a warning could be false.
- We worry that Russia's command and control of its nuclear weapons will also erode.

This briefing is imaginary, and it would not likely have been given to the president in exactly this form. I believe, however, that the facts are accurate.

As President Reagan's former Undersecretary of Defense Fred Ikle has recently observed, a man from Mars comparing the U.S. nuclear posture today with that at the height of the Cold War would find them essentially indistinguishable.

Today our nuclear posture is based on a strategy designed for a far different era—when the Soviet Union threatened a catastrophic nuclear attack, had the conventional forces to overrun Europe, and championed a communist crusade against the freedoms that define our nation. Today Russia is not promoting a competing economic or political system, it is struggling to make its way in a new global economy.

The old threats we faced during the Cold War—a Soviet nuclear strike or an invasion of Europe—were threats made dangerous by Soviet strength. The new threats we face today—eroded early warning and increased reliance on early launch, and increased reliance on tactical nuclear weapons—are threats made dangerous by Russia's weakness. And these threats go far beyond deployed nuclear forces. Much of Russia's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and materials are poorly secured; its weapons scientists and security personnel poorly paid. This, too, is a consequence of Russia's economic weakness, and it multiplies the chance that weapons of mass destruction will come into the hands of rogue states or terrorists.

Not only are the threats today different; the means to meet them are different. We addressed the Cold War's threats by confrontation with Moscow, and over the long term, we cannot rule out a possible return to this confrontation. But most of today's greatest threats we can address only in cooperation with Russia. This is the overarching present day reality of our relationship.

This is not to say that we must embrace Russia as a friend or an ally. That will depend on Russia's behavior, and we will certainly continue to have frictions, frustrations, and disagreements. This is to acknowledge, however, that in spite of and because of its economic weakness, Russia will be a major factor, for better or for worse, across most of the spectrum of actual and potential threats we face.

We have a vital national security interest not only in assuring strategic stability between our two countries, we also have a vital national security interest in working with Russia to make sure that weapons of mass destruction do not end up in the hands of those who would not hesitate to use them against America and our allies or against Russia.

To some extent, this is something both countries have recognized. In the past ten years, we worked with Russia to persuade Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus to give up the nuclear weapons they inherited from the Soviet Union. This eliminated more nuclear weapons than those contained in the entire nuclear arsenals of China, France, and the United Kingdom

combined, and kept these newly independent states from adding their fingers to the nuclear trigger. Our cooperative program has destroyed hundreds of missiles and hardened silos, more than 80 bombers, 18 nuclear submarines and hundreds of submarine launchers, and deactivated thousands of warheads.

We have also helped the Russians secure their nuclear weapons and materials to prevent theft and accidents; helped them convert nuclear weapons facilities to civilian purposes; and helped them employ their weapons scientists in peaceful purposes. There is a long way to go to complete this mission. We have just started to work with Russia to make improvements in joint early warning communications, to reduce the chance of catastrophic error. These are important steps, but we need giant strides.

I am puzzled by recent rumors that indicate that budgets for these essential threat reduction programs may be seriously reduced. If true, this would be heading backward. No one knows how long the present window of opportunity will remain open.

More than 1,000 tons of highly enriched uranium, and at least 150 tons of weapons-grade plutonium, exist in the Russian weapons complex, enough to build at least 60,000 nuclear weapons. Many storage sites are poorly secured. Thousands of weapons scientists are still without a steady paycheck, and terrorist groups and rogue states are trying to exploit the situation.

As a Department of Energy task force, chaired by former Senator Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler, reported in January, this represents America's greatest unmet threat. No investment pays a higher dollar-for-dollar dividend in national security than investment in threat reduction. None.

I welcome the president's review of these programs, and I believe that they can be better coordinated and made more effective. I am optimistic about this review, because President Bush expressed support for threat reduction during the campaign, and showed that he knows that new thinking is required. I quote from his remarks at the Reagan Library: "Both Russia and the United States face a changed world. Instead of confronting each other, we confront the legacy of a dead ideological rivalry—thousands of nuclear weapons, which, in the case of Russia, may not be secure. And together we also face an emerging threat—from rogue nations, nuclear theft and accidental launch. All this requires nothing short of a new strategic relationship to protect the peace of the world." I agree, and I trust that the president's final budget and policies will reflect his words of wisdom.

The Bush administration also is undertaking reviews of the U.S. nuclear posture, missile defenses, and conventional forces. As they take on this challenge, I urge them to be willing to think anew without any undue homage to inherited presumptions.

Our task is formidable, and our approach must be comprehensive. We must address the threats of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and multiple delivery systems, update our approach to deterrence, get an accounting of the numbers and deployments of tactical nuclear weapons, reduce the risk of an accidental launch, cut the risk of a terrorist attack, counter the threat of a rogue nation attack, and limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We will not be successful unless we are able to work with nations whose cooperation is essential for effective defenses against these multiple dangers.

We must recognize that our national security is not enhanced by pursuing arms control treaties at all costs; or by seeking deep reductions at all costs; or by deploying national missile defense at all costs. Each approach is a means to advance our safety, but none can make us secure on its own. The threats are interrelated; our approach must be interrelated.

To borrow a sports metaphor, we must defend against the long bomb, but we also have to guard against the end run. Any good coach will consider whether being too focused on

stopping one threat could leave the team more vulnerable to another. The value of each component of our defense must be measured not by its ability to counter one threat, but by its role in our overall strategy of defense against the full range of threats.

As we struggle to think anew, we must be guided by a broader vision. As that famous strategist Yogi Berra observed: "You've got to be careful if you don't know where you're going ...'cause you might not get there." In terms of direction, I believe we should seek a world:

- Where nations rely on nuclear weapons less, not more. Unfortunately, Russia today is moving in the opposite direction. So are India, Pakistan and perhaps China.
- We should seek a world:

Where the United States and Russia move beyond a Doomsday posture and no longer threaten each other with nuclear annihilation or nation-ending damage. Until we do this, the U.S. and Russia cannot have what anyone would call a normal relationship.

- We should seek a world:

Where our strategic posture, both offensive and defensive, does not undermine our ability to cooperate with major powers like Russia and China, and with allies like NATO and Japan, to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

- We should seek a world:

Where we evaluate our policies, strategies, and programs by their ability to move toward zero the risk that nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction will ever be used anywhere, by anyone, whether by design or accident.

Some will say we will never be at zero risk. I agree, but that should not affect our direction and our purpose. I believe that we must move in this direction, not at the expense of our security, but on behalf of it. Let me be clear, I am not talking about the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, a goal that generates much skepticism and disagreement. I am talking about risk management and risk reduction, an objective on which there can and should be broad common ground. To move in this direction, however, we have to face some difficult but fundamental questions that have been deferred far too long. Let me conclude my remarks by asking a few of them.

- (1) If our objective is to move with Russia from a posture of mutual assured destruction toward mutual assured safety, we must ask: Has Russia's weakened economic and security condition, combined with continued U.S. capacity for a rapid, massive strike, increased the risk of a Russian accident or mistake with catastrophic consequences for us and for them? Do we really have strategic stability today, or are we like the frog that doesn't jump out of the pot because the water comes to a boil slowly?
- (2) If our objective is to help move Russian and U.S. fingers further from the nuclear trigger, we must ask: Are there changes that the U.S. and Russia can make in how we operate our forces that would give each President more nuclear decision-making time, expanding minutes to hours, then perhaps hours to days? Can we get our best thinkers, including our military experts, together to discuss what can be done to ease the trigger pressure on both sides?

This discussion could lead to force structure changes, deployment changes, alert changes or reductions in the number of weapons, or all of these. Difficult—yes—but

these steps in the long run may be more important in reducing the risk of a catastrophe than the absolute number of weapons.

- (3) If our objective is to ensure that nuclear weapons can't be launched by accident, then we must ask:
  - (a) Can we strengthen and build on the early warning system cooperation we have just started with Russia?
  - (b) Can we assure that the United States and Russia can quickly and accurately identify a nuclear attack from a third party, so that a rogue state or terrorist group could not trigger a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States?
  - (c) And while we are trying to prevent accidents, why not look seriously at the possibility of both the United States and Russia installing destruct packages on nuclear missiles, so that both of our countries can destroy our own missile launched by accident, before it can destroy a city or start a war. We have these destruct devices on test missiles; why not nuclear missiles?
  - (d) Can we find a way to increase our security against a limited ballistic missile attack—a national security goal I have long supported—without undercutting the international cooperation we depend on to help defend ourselves against the full range of threats from weapons of mass destruction?
- (4) If our objective is to ensure that nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and materials don't fall into the hands of rogue nations and terrorists, we must ask: Is this a priority or an afterthought? If it's an afterthought—after what? What comes before it? If it is a priority, is that reflected in our effort and investment? Are our allies in Asia and Europe doing their share? If not, why not?
- (5) If our objective is to find a speedier alternative path to traditional arms control by taking unilateral action:
  - (a) Can we avoid the problems we now have with Russian tactical nuclear weapons, where we don't know how many they have and where they are?
  - (b) Can we avoid abandoning the benefits of arms control, such as transparency and verification?
  - (c) If we take unilateral steps, can we follow with a formal legal agreement that will ensure accountability, predictability and stability?
  - (d) Can we expand the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, as Senator Lugar has suggested, in order to create incentives for Russia to make reciprocal changes that we can verify?

We must think anew.

Even in the age of quantum physics, there are some Newtonian principles that are still instructive—a body at rest tends to stay at rest, unless acted on by an outside force. This is the law of inertia, and it applies not only to celestial bodies and billiard balls, but also to bureaucracies and nuclear policymakers. They, like all of us, are inclined to continue doing things as they have always done them, unless acted on by an outside force.

First and foremost, the impetus for change must come from the president, but to bring about a fundamental, sustainable shift in nuclear weapons and non-proliferation strategy, the force for change must come also from bipartisan leadership in the Congress, with the support of the American public. That is what it will take for any strategy to survive annual budget reviews, presidential successions, and one Congress after another.

Changing our thinking to chart a new course will not be easy. But who said citizenship would be easy? When Albert Einstein was asked why we have made so many advances in physics, and so few advances in politics, he answered, "That's obvious. Politics is more difficult than physics."

But politics, even though difficult and frustrating, fuels our democratic process, and this democratic process is the best hope we have. I am confident that if we all do more to make sure the American people, and their elected representatives, have the facts and recognize the stakes, our nation will think and act anew.