

**STATEMENT BY TED TURNER
ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE
NUCLEAR THREAT INITIATIVE
JANUARY 8, 2001**

It is with great hope and anticipation that we address you about the initiative Senator Nunn and I are launching today. The Nuclear Threat Initiative is the product of months of discussions and consultations with some of the world's most respected security experts.

The threat we face from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is real. It is even more urgent now since it seems to have fallen off of most people's "radar screens" during the past ten years.

Like everyone else, we thought that when the cold war ended, we no longer had to worry about nuclear annihilation. Yet, the progress we have made in the last ten years has been marginal at best. Despite the fact we are no longer enemies, the U.S. and Russia still maintain nearly 3,000 nuclear weapons each on high alert.

Our technologies are not infallible. Two examples are the explosion of the Concorde and the sinking of the Russian submarine Kursk. An accidental nuclear exchange is not out of the question.

In many ways, the threat has become more complex and dangerous. In addition to the risk of a nuclear exchange, we now have serious and urgent concerns about the security of weapons and bomb-making materials. We are threatened by the risk of proliferation of weapons expertise from laboratories, the deterioration of command control systems, the proliferation of missile technology, etc.

Furthermore, maintaining our nuclear arsenals is not cheap. It has been estimated that the U.S. spends \$30 billion every year maintaining its 10,000+ nuclear weapons and their launchers – a number that makes "overkill" an understatement. This money could be used more efficiently elsewhere in the budget. The same can be said for Russia and the other nuclear weapons states.

In October 2000, CNN independently produced a special report, "Rehearsing Doomsday," which put some of these issues into perspective. [If you did not have the opportunity to see it, we will provide you with a copy.] This report, as well as all of the consultations and discussions, brought home a key fact: we have lived virtually our entire lives under the threat of nuclear war. If there had ever been any logical reason for that state of affairs, it no longer exists. We have therefore decided to do what we can to work toward decreasing that threat. There is no greater legacy we could leave our children and grandchildren than a peaceful and safer world.

Too little attention has been paid to these issues over the last ten years. If we are to reduce the nuclear threat in all its forms, we need to raise public awareness and to inspire leadership and cooperation in this country and throughout the world. These efforts must also include biological and chemical weapons.

Senator Nunn has agreed to join me in these efforts, and we are proud to announce that he has accepted the position of Co-chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Nuclear Threat Initiative. We can think of no better person to lead this effort. Senator Nunn is one of the world's most respected security experts.

As we launch this effort, I would like to state that I, personally, advocate the complete elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, as quickly as possible. If fewer is better, then zero is best.

Every U.S. President since Johnson has pledged to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, as dictated by the Nonproliferation Treaty. And as recently as last May, all of the declared nuclear weapons states reaffirmed their "unequivocal undertaking" toward that end. Great nations keep their word. And I, for one, will continue to push the U.S. to fulfill this pledge.

Nevertheless, this is not the charge I have asked Sam to accept. Instead, his purpose will be devoted to a more limited objective: to take pragmatic and effective steps to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction as comprehensively and as urgently as is feasible. For that undertaking, there should be the broadest possible support. We do not need to develop consensus on weapons elimination to develop a common purpose to make step-by-step progress to diminish the threat of weapons of mass destruction. The Initiative's efforts aim to be a catalyst for action both in the U.S. and around the world. We should not miss this opportunity to make this a safer world.

Thank you.