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OPINION PIECES

THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

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Introduction: The Terrorist Threat

The last few years have been a time of unprecedented success in arms control. Over this period, we have seen the cornerstone of our efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons - the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) - indefinitely extended. A significant step towards reducing the overarmament of the Cold War was taken when START II was ratified by the US Senate. The signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ended the era of nuclear explosive testing, a goal that had been sought for more than forty years and, most recently, President Clinton and President Yeltsin agreed on a framework for START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) III after START II enters into force. Despite this string of successes, the world remains a dangerous place. The spread of technology has made it possible for dozens of States, many of whom view the United States as an enemy, to seek nuclear, biological or chemical weapons capability.

Ironically, the collapse of the Soviet Union has, in some ways, made us less safe. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990's, it was not readily apparent that this historic transformation would pose such a potentially dangerous situation. However, the change from a police State, where crime was virtually non-existent and movement was tightly controlled, to an environment where organized gangs are a major societal force and some military officers engage in corruption, has made the once unthinkable suddenly possible: the so-called "loose nukes" scenario wherein nuclear materials or the weapons themselves are stolen and sold to a pariah State, terrorist group, or organized crime.

The end of the Cold War left Russia with a huge surplus of nuclear weapons and materials - approximately 1,200 metric tons of highly-enriched uranium and 200 metric tons of plutonium. This total potentially translates into more than one hundred thousand nuclear weapons. The amount of material, separate from actual weapons, can be expected to grow as Russia continues to dismantle its nuclear arsenal. Whereas this material was once kept under tight control, the reorganization of its armed forces and its struggling economy have left Russia's nuclear stockpile considerably less protected than it should be.

Personnel from the US General Accounting Office (GAO) who visited Russia in 1995 found that some facilities did not have a comprehensive inventory of their nuclear materials on hand and, incredibly, the visitors were, in one instance, able to gain access to fissile material without even showing identification to the lone unarmed security guard in the building. During the investigation in 1993 of a theft of enriched uranium used as fuel for naval propulsion reactors, a Russian military prosecutor reported that, at the time of the theft, potatoes were guarded better than nuclear fuel. Preventing the theft of nuclear materials from facilities in the former Soviet Union is one of the most important problems facing the world today, and it is crucial that we keep uranium and plutonium from falling into the wrong hands. The Nunn-Lugar program has been a signal success, but much more needs to be done, by and with Russia, as quickly as possible.

We should all remember the day three and a half years ago when a group of terrorists exploded a van filled with explosives under the World Trade Center in New York and the realization it brought that American soil was not immune to the plague of international terrorism. Following in the wake of that stunning realization was a chilling question asked by many: what if, instead of a mixture of fertilizer and fuel, the van had held a crude nuclear device containing relatively small amounts of highly-enriched uranium or plutonium? The World Trade Center and lower Manhattan would have been completely destroyed and the death toll would have been in the hundreds of thousands. Radiation would have hampered rescue efforts and much of New York City would have been contaminated by fallout.

One reason the possibility of a terrorist group using a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapon has increased is simply because the nature of terrorism itself seems to have changed. Terrorists no longer single-mindedly seek publicity, as they did in the 1970's and 80's. Many of today's terrorists remain anonymous, their sole objective being large-scale death and destruction with seemingly no rhyme or reason. The perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing had no compunctions about killing hundreds of innocents merely because they happened to work in a federal building. The Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan, which in 1995 unleashed sarin gas on unsuspecting subway passengers, was attempting to murder thousands of innocent civilians and made no

attempt to claim responsibility or gain publicity for their actions. It had been reported that, prior to this incident, the cult had unsuccessfully attempted to acquire a nuclear weapon from Russia. There is no doubt that, had they been able to attain access, they would have had no reservations about its use. These are frightening examples of how the modern breed of terrorist seeks massive devastation. If such terrorists acquire a nuclear device, or chemical or biological weapons, they will likely seek to use them.

Disarmament as a Way of Meeting the Threat

In regards to US nuclear weapons policy, the National Academy of Sciences makes various suggestions in its recent report, *The Future of US Nuclear Weapons Policy*. These include a pledge by the United States to a "no first use policy" in regard to its nuclear arsenal and steps to decrease levels of nuclear weapons to those necessary only for a "core deterrence" function. The current levels of weapons maintained by the United States and Russia are clearly unnecessary and any more than the minimum number required for the function of core deterrence constitute a greater threat to security than they protect against.

The vast stockpiles of nuclear weapons remaining from the intense buildup of the last fifty years pose a serious threat to security in the post Cold-War world. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the focus has shifted from the fear of nuclear exchanges between Russia and the United States to the additional very real possibility of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction. The current unstable political environment in Russia provides an opportunity for terrorist acquisition of nuclear weapons due to the insecurity and consequent vulnerability of the underprotected Russian nuclear stockpile. The recent successes in arms control must not create a false sense of security. The present atmosphere is a dangerous one with the most crucial obstacles to promoting a more stable world order still to be overcome.

The NPT has been and will continue to be a key factor in this process. Its indefinite extension is a positive and vital step in providing for future arms reductions and guarantees of non-proliferation on the part of non-nuclear-weapon States. The NPT regime, including the many additional arrangements mandating international cooperation and verification through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is our principal defense. For this regime to work effectively, it must be strong and viable which means that both halves of the NPT basic bargain must be kept - the non-nuclear-weapon States promise to never have nuclear weapons and the nuclear-weapon States pledge to engage in nuclear disarmament negotiations aimed at ultimate abolition. Thus, nuclear disarmament negotiations directed toward reaching the lowest possible number of nuclear weapons as soon as this can be done are of interest to all States.

Conclusion

The National Academy report has shown the way. To limit nuclear weapons to their "core deterrence" function, their political value - bid up far too high during the Cold War - must be reduced. This is essential both for nuclear weapon reductions and non-proliferation. In addition to the adoption of a "no first use" nuclear weapons policy for the nuclear-weapons States, the Report calls for reductions down to the 200-300 level for the US and Russia (less for the other three nuclear-weapon States), as a residual level until the world changes sufficiently for abolition to become possible. These reductions must take place in a context of mutual transparency, which will require innovation from all sides. In this way, the nuclear-weapons States can meet their NPT obligations and the regime can remain strong to best protect all of us from the threat of the proliferation of nuclear weapons into dangerous hands. A key focus must be the safety and security of all weapons-useable nuclear material. Hopefully, the regimes operating under the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention can do the same.

The seeds have been planted for establishing a greater sense of world security in regard to nuclear weapons, as well as other weapons of mass destruction, but the United States and Russia must push forward and seriously engage each other and the entire world community before a sense of stability can be attained.

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