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Lawyers Alliance for World Security
Committee for National Security

1901 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 201, Washington, DC 20006
tel: (202)745-2450 *fax:* (202)667-0444 *e-mail:* disarmament@lawscns.org

Mark P. Schlefer
LAWS Chairman
Thomas Graham, Jr.
LAWS President
Nancy Ignatius
CNS President

Nuclear Non-Proliferation in the 21st Century: Reducing the Political Value of Nuclear Weapons

Remarks delivered by
Ambassador Thomas Graham, Jr.
University of Washington
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I would like to thank each of you for coming. Our topic is one of central importance to the future of efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, reducing the prestige value of nuclear weapons. As President Chirac of France, Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom and Chancellor Schroeder of Germany noted in an October 7th New York Times op-ed, "as we look to the next century, our greatest concern is proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and chiefly nuclear proliferation. We have to face the stark truth that nuclear proliferation remains the major threat to world safety."

If the next century is to be more secure than the last and if the world is to be freed from the dangers of nuclear weapons, the international community must cooperate to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime. The NPT, signed in 1968, is the cornerstone of international efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. It rests on a bargain between now 181 non-nuclear weapon states parties to the Treaty, which agreed to never acquire nuclear

weapons, and the five nuclear weapon states, which in return agreed to eventually eliminate their nuclear arsenals. If this bargain is not observed by the nuclear weapon states, it is possible that the NPT regime could begin to unravel, perhaps as soon as the next NPT Review Conference in April 2000.

Last December, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Canadian Parliament, chaired by our distinguished luncheon speaker Mr. Bill Graham, produced a report that included fifteen specific recommendations related to this subject. I would like to briefly address some of these, but I am certain that they will be addressed in greater detail during Chairman Graham's presentation. Among the Committee's most important recommendations was that Canada should "work consistently to reduce the political legitimacy and value of nuclear weapons in order to contribute to the goal of their progressive reduction and eventual elimination." This is a wise and important recommendation, and one that should be followed.

It is not primarily military or security-related justifications that drive nuclear proliferation, but the high perceived prestige value of these weapons. After India conducted its nuclear tests in May 1998, its Prime Minister announced that India is a big country now that it has nuclear weapons. This reflects a dangerous psychology that needs to be changed if the nuclear non-proliferation regime is to be preserved in the long term. One step that should be taken by the nuclear weapon states to reduce the prestige value of nuclear weapons is to strictly limit the role assigned to them.

The U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the Canberra Commission, and most recently the Tokyo Forum for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament have all concluded that the only role for nuclear weapons is deterring the use of other nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, some

commentators in nuclear weapon states continue to argue for new roles for nuclear weapons such as deterring or responding to the use of chemical or biological weapons. A less overt variant of such a policy, commonly referred to as a doctrine of "calculated ambiguity" because it suggests that uncertainty in the minds of potential aggressors about the nature of response to a chemical or biological attack would deter the use of these weapons, is also advocated by some.

Supporters of the "calculated ambiguity" concept suggest that veiled threats to use nuclear weapons in response to a chemical weapon attack deterred the use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein during the Persian Gulf War. While we will likely never know if this is true, revelations in memoirs by senior policymakers that the United States was bluffing and never had any intention of using nuclear weapons, even in response to a CBW attack, have ensured that "calculated ambiguity" probably will not be effective in the future. Rather, it is likely that such a bluff would be called, with potentially devastating consequences.

Instead of relying on calculated ambiguity, the United States and NATO should declare that they would under no circumstances introduce nuclear weapons to a conflict and agree instead to rely on their overwhelming conventional superiority to deter or respond to the use of chemical and biological weapons. Such a policy would be consistent with the findings of the Canberra Commission, the Tokyo Forum and the National Academy of Sciences, and would reduce the perceived value of nuclear weapons.

The government of Canada has taken a lead on this issue, starting with the report by the Chairman Graham's Committee and the subsequent response of the Canadian government, which I believe my colleague Mr. Meyer will address further. Recommendation 15 in the Committee report recommended that "the Government of Canada argue forcefully within NATO that the present re-examination and update as necessary of the Alliance Strategic Concept should include

its nuclear component." Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy himself intervened at the NATO Summit in April to assure that the Alliance agreed to conduct a review of its nuclear weapons use doctrine. I commend the Canadian government and Minister Axworthy for these efforts and urge them to continue pressing NATO to include nuclear weapon use doctrine on the agenda of the formal review to be announced by Ministers in December and ultimately to adopt a no first use policy. At this time it is uncertain whether nuclear doctrine will be included on the agenda for the Review. But if NATO is unwilling to even address nuclear doctrine in the formal review – against a backdrop of CTBT rejection, stalemate in strategic nuclear negotiations in Russia and a threat to the viability of the ABM Treaty – this will have a seriously negative effect on the April 2000 NPT Review Conference and the future strength of the NPT regime. Thus, it is most important that NATO Ministers in December include nuclear weapon use policy on the Review Agenda.

Germany and to lesser extent the Netherlands, Italy and others have expressed support for a NATO no first use policy and other allies such as the Czech Republic for example, have indicated that they are interested in such a policy but are unwilling to alienate the United States. At the same time, there are some elements within the United States that support a review by NATO of its nuclear doctrine but are unwilling to take the lead without a clear demonstration of support from the European allies. If this dilemma is to be overcome efforts like those of Minister Axworthy, Chairman Graham and others in Canada and elsewhere must continue.

Calculated ambiguity or any other policy that contemplates a first use of nuclear weapons is damaging to the NPT regime because it is potentially inconsistent with NPT-related commitments first made to NPT non-nuclear-weapon states as early as 1978 and because it enhances the perceived value of nuclear weapons. At the first United Nations Special

Conference on Disarmament in 1978, then-U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance articulated the first official U.S. pledge of non-use of nuclear weapons against NPT non-nuclear-weapon states (referred to as a negative security assurance). The United Kingdom and the Soviet Union made similar pledges.

During negotiations to extend the NPT in 1995, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 984, which acknowledged formal commitments made by the nuclear-weapon states to refrain from using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states parties to the NPT unless such a state were to attack in alliance with another nuclear-weapon state. Additionally, in agreeing to the appropriate protocols of three nuclear weapons free zone agreements, the nuclear-weapon states have pledged not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the more than 110 non-nuclear-weapon states that are members of such regimes. These security commitments have been recognized by the World Court as legally binding and are essential to maintaining non-nuclear-weapon state confidence in the NPT regime. None of these commitments contain exceptions that would allow the use of nuclear weapons in response to an attack with chemical and/or biological weapons.

A third key recommendation made by the Standing Committee is revitalization of the START process between the United States and Russia. Unfortunately, recent reports from Moscow indicate that the prospects do not appear to be good at the present time. With the report of the Rumsfeld Commission last year, many in congress are concerned anew with the alleged missile threat from so-called "rogue states" such as Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. They argue that the ABM Treaty is a relic of the Cold War and that U.S. national security requires the deployment of a limited national missile defense system against the threat of missile attacks from these nations regardless of the ABM Treaty. For its part, understanding the politics of this issue,

the Clinton Administration has pursued discussions with the Russians intended to attain agreement from Moscow to negotiate amendments to the ABM Treaty that would allow the deployment of a limited defense.

The link between strategic offensive and defensive systems remains as critical today as it was during the Cold War. The recent statement by Russian Defense Minister Sergeyev that U.S. unilateral deployment of NMD systems would do "unacceptable damage to the reduction of strategic offensive weapons" demonstrates this fact quite clearly. China and France have similarly indicated that unilateral US deployment of NMD systems, even those designed to ward off attack from rogue states, would cause them to expand rather that contract their nuclear arsenals. It is important to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts that the viability of both the ABM Treaty and the START processes be preserved.

If deployment by the United States of a limited national missile defense against so-called "rogue states" is judged to be necessary, any damage to arms limitations and non-proliferation that could be caused by such a deployment could be minimized by carefully revising the ABM Treaty through negotiations and cooperatively developing limited NMD systems with Russia, Europe and to a lesser degree China. Such cooperation would help to alleviate suspicions in Russia and elsewhere regarding the intended target of a unilateral U.S. NMD deployment and enable the pursuit of strategic reductions. It is noteworthy that Russia has been speaking of negotiated levels of strategic forces of 1500 or 1000 as opposed to 3000 to 3500 under the START II Treaty. Also, such cooperation likely would promote transparency between the nuclear weapon states, which is important to strategic force reductions.

A fourth Committee recommendation that warrants attention is recommendation 14, which stated that "Canada should complete the process of ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear

Test-Ban Treaty as quickly as possible and urge all other States to do likewise." When the indefinite extension of the NPT was negotiated in 1995, something the United States very much wanted, the states parties to the Treaty agreed to an associated Statement of Principles and Objectives which specifically called for the completion of the test ban by the end of 1996. The importance of the test ban to the non-proliferation regime is underscored by the fact that this was the only objective given a specific timeline for achievement. While the CTBT was opened for signature in 1996, the vote to reject rather than ratify by the United States Senate will be seen by significant non-nuclear weapon states, who only reluctantly agreed to a permanent NPT in 1995, as an act of bad faith freeing them from their commitment to a permanent NPT.

The Senate rejection of the CTBT is tantamount to a statement to potential proliferators that, although the United States has not tested in seven years and has no intention of testing in the foreseeable future, to use President Clinton's phrase, you have the green light. The door may have been opened to the gradual disintegration over the next five to ten years of the NPT and the resultant widespread proliferation of nuclear weapons. Once opened, that door will be difficult to close. This would create a nightmarish situation for U.S. national security. India and Pakistan may not sign the CTBT as they had promised to do in the near future and could conduct further nuclear tests. Nations such as North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Indonesia and Egypt eventually may test nuclear weapons. Should any of these states test nuclear weapons, it is probable that many other states such as Japan, South Korea, and others would reconsider their status as non-nuclear weapon states. This would of course completely destroy the NPT regime, which could never be revived. We would just have to be prepared to live in a widely proliferated world. The recent military coup in Pakistan, the first in a nuclear-equipped nation, underscores the danger of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of unstable regimes and regional adversaries. The

Clinton Administration was correct to reaffirm that the CTBT remains a priority of the United States. Sincere efforts must be made to bring that Treaty into force.

One final recommendation that I would like to address is the Committee's recommendation to encourage the involvement of the United Kingdom, France, and China in the nuclear disarmament process. A five-power nuclear disarmament discussion and negotiation is something that must happen in the not too distant future if the NPT regime is to survive for the long-term future. It is essential to the health of the NPT regime that the five nuclear weapon states pursue greater transparency measures and engage in negotiations aimed at reductions in nuclear arsenals down to the low hundreds for the United States and Russia and less for the other three nuclear weapon states. While to a great extent this hinges on the success of the U.S.-Russian reductions, if the NPT is to be sustained it should be made clear that all nuclear weapon states remain committed to their NPT Article VI obligations.

If the next century is to be more secure than the last, this then this is the path I believe we must follow. Canada through the 15 recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee and many other constructive steps has shown us its way. We must all work together to strengthen the NPT regime and other international treaties for the indefinite future and create a more peaceful and stable world for the next century. Thank you for your attention.