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Updating NATO's Nuclear Doctrine

Remarks by
Ambassador Thomas Graham, Jr.
President of the Lawyers Alliance for World Security
December 21, 1998 – The Old Ebbitt Grill

Thank you all for coming on this busy news morning. I would like to take a few moments to prepare you for a crisis to come.

In many ways the danger of a major city in the United States, or somewhere else being destroyed by a nuclear weapon is greater now than before. The NATO Alliance clearly commands the destructive power to deter those who can be deterred, but the prevention of proliferation to undeterrable actors has become a chief security concern that will require revision of NATO's Cold War doctrine regarding nuclear weapons. NATO's policy of reserving the right to use nuclear weapons first may have been appropriate during the Cold War, but now it is contrary to our international commitments associated with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the NPT, and a direct contradiction to our non-proliferation efforts.

The right to use nuclear weapons first was thought to be important to the defense of NATO during the Cold War because of the former Warsaw Pact's superiority in conventional forces. But since the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, it is NATO which maintains conventional superiority in Europe greater than has ever been enjoyed by any force in history.

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Continued insistence that the largest conventional force in the world would need to use nuclear weapons first strains NATO's credibility, as well as the belief by the world's non-nuclear weapon states that their own security does not require a nuclear weapons guarantee.

The civilized world's principal defense against the proliferation of nuclear weapons to irresponsible states, terrorist organizations, or criminal conspiracies is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (the NPT). In order to preserve this necessary foundation of post-Cold War security, NATO's nuclear strategy must be consistent with the non-proliferation priorities of its member states which are all states parties to the NPT. Concluded in 1968, the NPT is the legal framework that establishes the international norm against nuclear proliferation and serves as the foundation for all other efforts to control weapons of mass destruction. When it was being negotiated, many predicted that there could be as many as thirty nuclear weapon states by the end of the 1970s, and who knows how many today, if the trend toward nuclear proliferation had been left unchecked. The NPT gave the world a thirty year respite from further proliferation. While three countries – India, Pakistan, and Israel – remained aloof from the Treaty they were careful not to openly defy the regime; until India and Pakistan did so earlier this year.

Overt nuclear proliferation in South Asia, amid fervent denunciation of the NPT as a discriminatory and even racist regime, and other ominous developments, now threaten to upset the delicate balance of on which both nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament depend. The original NPT signatories in 1968 -- and all of the countries that have joined since to form a nearly global non-proliferation community -- agreed that the number of nuclear weapon states in the world should be limited to the five states that already possessed nuclear weapons. The nuclear arsenals of the five were not approved by the NPT; they are specifically challenged by Article VI and their ultimate abolition is mandated by the Treaty. However, the performance of

the nuclear weapon states in moving toward nuclear disarmament has been insufficient in the eyes of many non-nuclear weapon states. Many of those that have voluntarily foresworn the nuclear weapon option on the conditions that only five states would have nuclear weapons, and that those five would work toward disarmament, may reconsider their own commitments in light of changes in these conditions. Many have said as much, and if any leave the Treaty regime, more would surely follow.

The world is at a fork in the road with regard to nuclear proliferation. If the NPT is to be preserved, and the number of states and other groups armed with nuclear weapons is to be limited, all of the Treaty's states parties must work together towards its fundamental goal: the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. One important milestone will be the Third Preparatory Committee Meeting this Spring for the year 2000 NPT Review Conference. The first two Preparatory Committee Meetings ended in diplomatic disaster, and the third is likely to do the same unless the nuclear weapon states do more to live up to their disarmament commitments. But the NATO Summit, which will happen at almost the same time as the NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting, is likely to reinforce the overly high political value of nuclear weapons by rubber-stamping the outdated, Cold War language which pervades the old NATO Strategic Concept document. This would lead to a diplomatic train wreck which would gravely endanger the NPT and it cannot be allowed to happen; NATO's strategy review preceding the Summit must be a real review, and those who already realize the dangers of mindless consistency must speak out to make it so.

Canada and Germany have both asked the question of whether or not it is time to revisit NATO's first use policy in light of the end of the Cold War and changed security threats and requirements. This is a timely and important question. If the NATO Summit re-affirms the

antiquated, Cold War language of the current Alliance Strategic Concept document without revision it will have a negative impact on the Third Preparatory Committee Meeting for the 2000 NPT Review Conference which will occur at the same time. This old language and a first use policy does not protect the Alliance, but if it does not change, it may contribute to greatly increasing the threat of widespread nuclear proliferation. I have just returned from the United Kingdom, and over the last fourteen months I have also led delegations to Bonn, Paris, and Ottawa to discuss this important issue, I will be visiting the capitals of Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy in the new year. In conjunction with the British American Security Information Council, the Berlin Information Center for Transatlantic Security, the Fourth Freedom Forum, and with the support of the W. Alton Jones Foundation, the Lawyers Alliance for World Security will work to inform NATO Governments and publics about the disastrous impact continued reservation of the right to use nuclear weapons first will have on NATO security.