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Henry Kissinger

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Mr. Foreign Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me begin with one German sentence to follow Wolfgang Ishinger: [statement in German]

In the presence of so many distinguished members of the Administration -- of the new American Administration -- I hope you all understand that I'm speaking here as an observer. I think I understand the approaches of the new Administration. Senator McCain has been my friend all my life. President Obama is my President. And like Senator McCain, I will do my utmost to bring about a bipartisan foreign policy, so that we can approach the topics we're discussing here as a unified country, and with a long sense of purpose. And I have tried to keep this in mind also in preparing my remarks.

Now the basic dilemma of the nuclear age has been with us since Hiroshima: how to bring the destructiveness of modern weapons into some moral or political relationship with the objectives that are being pursued. Any use of nuclear weapons is certain to involve a level of casualties and devastation out of proportion to foreseeable foreign policy objectives. Efforts to develop a more nuanced application have never been persuasive -- from the doctrine of "limited nuclear war" in the 1950s to the "mutual assured destruction" theory of later periods.

In office, I recoiled before the options produced by the prevalent nuclear strategies, especially since these prospects were generated by weapons for which their could not be any operational experience, so that calculations and limitations were largely theoretical.



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But I was also persuaded -- and remain persuaded -- that if the U.S. government adopts such considerations as its policy, it would be turning over the world's security to the most ruthless and perhaps genocidal.

In the two-power world of the Cold War, the adversaries managed to avoid this dilemma. The nuclear arsenals on both sides grew in numbers and sophistication. But except for the Cuban missile crisis, where a Soviet combat division seemed to have been initially authorized to use its nuclear weapons to defend itself, neither side approached the actual use of nuclear weapons, either against each other or in wars against non-nuclear third countries. In fact, they put in place, step-by-step, a series of safeguards to prevent accidents, misjudgments, and unauthorized launches.

But the end of the Cold War produced a paradoxical result: The threat of nuclear war between the nuclear superpowers has essentially disappeared. But the spread of technology -- especially peaceful nuclear energy -- has multiplied the feasibility of acquiring nuclear weapons by separating plutonium or from enriching uranium produced by peaceful nuclear reactors. The sharpening of ideological dividing lines and the persistence of unresolved regional conflicts have magnified the incentives to acquire nuclear weapons, especially by rogue states or non-state actors. The calculations of mutual insecurity that produced restraint during the Cold War do not apply with anything like the same degree to the new entrants in the nuclear field and even less so to the non-state actors. This is why proliferation of nuclear weapons has become an overarching strategic problem.

Any further spread of nuclear weapons multiplies the possibilities of nuclear confrontation and magnifies the danger of diversion. Thus, if proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continues into Iran and remains in North Korea in the face of all ongoing negotiations, the incentives for other countries to follow the same path will become overwhelming.

Considerations as these have induced former Senator Sam Nunn, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, former Secretary of State George Shultz, and I -- two Democrats and two Republicans -- to publish recommendations for systematically reducing and eventually eliminating reliance on nuclear weapons. We have a record of strong commitment to national defense and security. We continue to affirm the importance of adequate deterrent forces, and we do not want our recommendations to diminish essentials for the defense of free peoples while a process of adaptation to new realities is going on. At the same time, we reaffirm the objective of a world without nuclear weapons that has been proclaimed by every American President since President Eisenhower.

Such a world will prove increasingly remote unless the nuclear weapons programs in Iran and the existing one in North Korea are overcome. In the case of Iran, negotiations are going on. In the case of North Korea, a six-party forum has demanded the elimination of nuclear weapons. And North Korea has agreed to abandon its program but is so procrastinating in its implementation that it threatens to create a legitimacy for the stockpile it has already achieved.



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I have long advocated negotiations with Iran on a broad front. Too many treat this as a kind of psychological exercise. In fact, it will be tested by concrete answers to four specific questions: [1] How close is Iran to a nuclear weapons capability? [2] At what pace is it moving? [3] What balance of rewards and penalties will move Iran to abandon it? [4] What do we do if, despite our best effort, diplomacy fails? That is a task for all of us in the Western Alliance. And as somebody who was in office when we had close relations with Iran, let me say that this was not on the basis of personal preference for specific domestic institutions in Iran but on the basis of a conviction that a strong Iran, pursuing its national interests in the region, is also in the American interests, and that this option should be open to whatever government is prepared to negotiate with us.

Arresting and then reversing the proliferation of nuclear weapons places a special responsibility on the established nuclear powers. They share no more urgent common interests than preventing the emergence of more nuclear-armed states. The persistence of unresolved regional conflicts makes nuclear weapons a powerful lure in many parts of the world to intimidate neighbors and serve as a deterrent to countries who might otherwise intervene. Established nuclear powers should strive to make a nuclear capability less tempting by devoting their diplomatic efforts to diffuse unresolved conflicts that today make a nuclear arsenal so attractive.

A new nuclear agenda requires coordinated efforts on several levels: in the declaratory policy of the United States; in the U.S.-Russian relationship; in joint efforts with allies as well as other non-nuclear states relying on American deterrence; in securing nuclear weapons and materials on a global basis; and, finally, reducing the role of nuclear weapons in the doctrines and operational planning of nuclear weapons states.

The new American Administration has already signaled that a global nuclear agenda will be a high priority in preparation for the Review Conference on the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty scheduled for the spring of 2010. A number of measures can be taken unilaterally or bilaterally with Russia to reduce the preemptive risk of certain alert measures and the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons.

A word about Russian relations: For over 30 years after the formation of the Western Alliance, the Russian threat was the motivating and unifying force in Western nuclear policy. Now that the Soviet Union no longer exists, it is important to warn against the danger of basing policy on self-fulfilling prophecies. Russia and the United States between them control around 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. They have it in their power to reduce the reliance on nuclear weapons in their bilateral relationship. They have already done so on a limited basis for 15 years on such issues as the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. The immediate need is, as the foreign minister has pointed out, is to start negotiations to extend the START I agreement, the sole document for the verification and monitoring of established ceilings on strategic weapons, which expires at the end of this year.



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That should be the occasion to explore significant reductions from the 1,700 to 2,000 permitted under the Moscow Treaty of 2002. A general review of the strategic relationship should also examine the way to enhance security at nuclear facilities in Russia and the United States.

A key issue has been missile defense -- especially with respect to defenses deployed against threats from proliferating countries. The dialogue on this subject should be resumed at the point at which it was left by President George [W.] Bush and then-President Vladimir Putin in April 2008. The Russian proposal for a joint missile defense towards the Middle East, including radar sites in southern Russia, has always seemed to me a creative political and strategic approach which should be examined -- of course especially for all of us in this room.

The effort to develop a new nuclear agenda must involve our allies from its inception. U.S. and NATO policy must be integrally linked. Key European allies are negotiating with Iran. America deploys tactical nuclear weapons in several NATO countries, and NATO declaratory policy mirrors that of the United States. There is therefore a basis and a necessity for strengthening these review processes and adapting them to the emerging realities. Parallel discussions are needed with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. And they are also imperative with China, India, and Pakistan. It must be understood that the incentive for nuclear weapons on the subcontinent are more regional than those of the established nuclear powers and their threshold for using them considerably lower.

(Before Wolfgang feels that I have lost all discipline, let me warn him...I'm aware of the [time-keeping] light and we're near the end of my remarks.)

The complexity of these issues explains why my colleagues and I have chosen an incremental, step-by-step approach. We are not able -- certainly I'm not able -- to describe the characteristics of the final goal: how one would determine the size of stockpiles; how to eliminate them totally and to verify the results. By affirming the desirability of the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, we have concentrated on the steps that are achievable and verifiable. My colleague, Sam Nunn, has described the effort as akin to climbing a mountain shrouded in clouds: We cannot describe the top to be certain that there may not be unforeseen, perhaps even insurmountable, obstacles. But we are prepared to undertake the journey in the belief that the summit will never come into view unless we begin the ascent and deal with the proliferation issues immediately before us, including the Iranian and North Korean programs.

A closing word: A subject at first largely dominated by military experts has increasingly attracted the concern of advocates of disarmament. The dialogue between them has not always been as fruitful as it should be. Strategists are suspicious of negotiated attempts to limit the scope of weapons. Disarmament experts occasionally seek to preempt the outcome of the debate by legislating restrictions that achieve their preferred result without reciprocity.



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The two groups must be brought together in our dialogue. So long as other countries build and improve their nuclear arsenals, deterrence of their use needs to be part of Western strategy. The program sketched here -- it's not a program for unilateral disarmament. Both President Obama and Senator McCain, while endorsing a world free of nuclear weapons, also made it clear, in President Obama's words, that the United States cannot implement it alone.

The danger posed by nuclear weapons is unprecedented and it brings us back to the basic challenge of the nuclear period: Our age has stolen the fire from the gods; can we confine it to peaceful purposes before it consumes us?

Thank you very much.