

## "MEETING TODAY'S SECURITY CHALLENGES"

by  
Charles B. Curtis

Let me begin by thanking Peter and the Brookings Institution for hosting this seminar. I have the good fortune of addressing you as President of the Nuclear Threat Initiative—a private organization founded last January and dedicated to reducing the threat from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. This urgent task brought together CNN founder, Ted Turner, and former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, who now co-chair the Initiative. Ted Turner has pledged a minimum of \$250 million to NTI.

This afternoon, I would like to tell you something about the work of NTI, our vision of global security, and the programs we fund and the policies we promote to advance that vision.

First, let me say, that Ted Turner and Sam Nunn have

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done an impressive job in recruiting a diverse and distinguished international board. It's an important part of our identity and an important enabler. So please allow me to spend a moment describing the Board's membership.

- U.S. Senators Pete Domenici and Richard Lugar;
- Andrei Kokoshin, a current member of the Russian Duma and former Deputy Minister of Defense;
- William Perry, now at Stanford and a former U.S. Secretary of Defense;
- Susan Eisenhower, President of the Eisenhower Institute;
- Rolf Ekeus, a former Ambassador, and now head of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute;
- Gene Habiger, retired U.S. Air Force General and former Commander-in-chief of the U.S. Strategic Command; and
- Dr. Jessica Mathews, the President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace;

- Dr. Amartya Sen, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics and native of India, who has conducted research in a wide range of fields including economics, philosophy and decision theory.
- Dr. Nafis Sadik, a national of Pakistan, who is past executive director of the United Nations Population Fund, with the rank of under secretary general.

We intend soon to flesh out our international perspective by adding to the Board individuals from China, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the Middle East.

We are working to make the most of Ted's generosity—and the expertise of the Board—by contributing to policies and activities to:

- bring weapons materials under secure control and reduce their quantities;
- limit the spread of weapons know-how;
- reduce the chance of intentional or accidental use of weapons of mass destruction;
- develop better strategies and means to guard against the emerging threat from biological weapons; and bring about changes in nuclear forces of a character that will enhance safety, security and stability.

As our Board composition implies, we intend this Initiative to be global in reach and purpose. We concentrate not just on the United States, Russia, and other nations of the former Soviet Union, but also on those regions of greatest proliferation concern in Asia and the Middle East.

I want to emphasize that activities of the Initiative are conducted with full transparency with the U.S. and with other governments. We believe we will make meaningful progress only by working in substantial cooperation with governments and in coordination with other non-profits and the private sector.

The public dialogue in America—on almost any issue—has been for three months now grounded in the events of September 11. There has been a lot of comment that September 11 changed everything. From the perspective of NTI, it is important to understand what changed on September 11, and what did not change.

*(continued to page 67)*

*(Curtis from page 63)*

What changed September 11 was not our vulnerability to terrorism but our understanding of it. The greatest shock was perhaps not even the sheer loss of life, which was staggering, but the evil intent behind it. The terrorists' willingness to take innocent lives is unbounded; the expression of their evil intent is limited only by the power of their weapons.

What did not change on September 11 is this: The most significant, clear and present danger we face in this nation and the world is the threat posed by nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Nothing else comes close. Yet, there is a dangerous gap between the threat and our response to these dangers.

We see it as a particular responsibility of NTI to promote dialogue, build common ground, and increase understanding of the gaps between the threats and our response –

- a gap in the way governments are organized to address the threat
- a gap in our resources
- a gap in our thinking
- a gap in public awareness.

I would like to discuss each of these four gaps in turn, and discuss how we see them, and how we are acting to help close them.

**First**, we at NTI strongly believe there is a wide and dangerous gap between the threat of weapons of mass destruction and the way our government – and other governments – are organized to protect us.

The expertise necessary to address these dangers effectively and comprehensively is wide-ranging – and distributed across many agencies of government. Some point to the involvement of so many agencies as evidence of a diffusion of responsibility and a fatal impediment to coherent management. It is not. It is evidence that such an effort – like homeland defense – requires knowledge of many disciplines, and therefore will always be a challenge to administer – a challenge that can be fully met, in our view, only with high-level leadership and program, policy, and budgetary coordination.

High-level attention to nonproliferation programs within the White House is the single most effective step we can take to make our programs match the growing threat of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Better interagency coordination, improved and more flexible funding, and programmatic flexibility will follow from this attention, and won't happen without it.

**Second**, we at NTI believe there is a wide gap between the threats and the resources we commit to address them. This Administration, indeed any Administration must be held to account both for the level and the administration of the funds devoted to these efforts. This accountability function is exercisable only if there is a single point of responsibility and transparency for the totality of funds committed to these urgent tasks.

We at NTI believe the US government should dramatically increase attention, effort and resources for its nonproliferation efforts. We have made the point in speeches, articles, congressional testimony, and meetings with members of Congress and Executive branch officials. But we also believe that the United States is not the only source of funding for this effort.

Europe is particularly important in this regard. The threats associated with the former Soviet WMD facilities, personnel, materials and arms affect Europe as much as they do the U.S., yet Europe has never allocated any significant financial and political capital to develop cooperative approaches to reducing these threats.

NTI is now funding a three-year effort with CSIS to develop a constituency in Europe for cooperative threat reduction programs with Russia, with the goal of creating a European program complimentary to the U.S. Government's "Nunn-Lugar" Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program. This would include a special emphasis on securing, reducing and/or eliminating tactical nuclear weapons and chemical and biological weapons and infrastructure.

NTI, in another effort to secure new resources, is exploring how we might foster a swap of Russian debt for a greater security investment on the Russian side to fix its proliferation vulnerabilities. We see this device as perhaps the most expeditious means for pooling resources into a coherent program to supplement the US effort.

Moreover, because it also addresses Russia's number one economic problem, it is likely to more effectively gain Russian cooperation, which is essential to program effectiveness. Obviously, our European CTR effort and the debt swap initiative may merge at some opportunistic point down the road.

NTI is also working to increase the effectiveness and the resource base of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). NTI recently made a three-year grant of \$1.2 million to support the expansion of IAEA programs to secure vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide. This grant was recently matched by a \$1.2 million grant from the U.S. government – which, in a custom I never saw in my time in government, actually gave credit to NTI for prompting their contribution.

We have also publicly advocated for relief from IAEA's 15-year no-growth budget caps and we were particularly pleased to observe that through no lobbying at all from us, which we are not allowed to do, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has unanimously agreed to recommend an increase in U.S. funding for the agency.

**Third**, we at NTI believe there is a gap between the threat and the kind of thinking we need to address it. Last January, former Senator Howard Baker and former White House Counsel Lloyd Cutler released the results of their task force study of the Department of Energy non-proliferation designed to secure nuclear, biological and chemical materials in Russia, and prevent Russia's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons scientists from selling their services to terrorists and rogue states.

Their report called these challenges: “the greatest unmet threat” and recommended that the President “quickly formulate a strategic plan to secure and/or neutralize in the next eight to ten years all nuclear weapons-usable material located in Russia and to prevent the outflow from Russia of scientific expertise that would be used for nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction.”

The task force put the price tag at approximately \$30 billion over ten years. That would come to four times the current budget. But the Baker-Cutler proposed budget is based on new thinking – which is to identify the strategic imperative first and then design and finance a plan to meet it. We still await a studied response from the new Administration.

We also need to abandon the residue of Cold War thinking that is still reflected in our policies. During the Cold War, our goal was to deter a Soviet Warsaw Pact invasion of Europe and a nuclear strike from the Soviet Union. We pursued this by building and deploying tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. Deterrence was designed to work against nations, not non-state actors who may have nothing to protect and nothing to lose. Today, the most likely near-term threat is not nuclear missiles launched from a nation-state, but biological weapons in an aerosol can, chemical weapons in a subway or ventilation system, or nuclear or radiological weapons in the belly of a ship or the back of a truck, delivered by a group with no return address.

As these new risks have grown over the past decade, our policies have not kept pace, and this gap in our thinking has opened an increasingly dangerous gap between the threats and our response.

The gap between the threat and our thinking was made painfully clear with the release of anthrax this fall. The United States government has on file scenarios and satellite photos and Pentagon plans for most any category of threat you can imagine. But a biological weapons attack on the United States fit no existing category.

We are now coming to understand that public health is an important pillar in our national security framework.

In the event of a biological weapons attack – millions of lives will depend on how quickly doctors diagnose the illness, report their findings, and bring forth a fast and effective federal response. This means, clearly, that public health and medical professionals must be part of the national security team.

This may seem obvious enough. But two years ago, when Administration officials were meeting to discuss supplemental funding legislation for biological weapons – the presiding official from the Office of Management and Budget greeted the officials from the NSC, and FBI and CIA and DoD, then saw the Assistant Secretary from Health and Human Services at the table, did a double-take and said: “What are you doing here?”

The Assistant Secretary at HHS, who was also formerly New York City Health Commissioner, is Dr. Peggy Hamburg, and I am proud to say she now leads our biological programs at NTI.

The biological weapons threat may turn out to be the most significant danger of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the hardest to defend against. Dr. Hamburg has taken the lead in planning a series of projects with the biotechnology industry, the academic community, and government scientists to develop standards and oversight practices that can reduce the potential for harmful applications of biotechnology and biological research without encumbering the pursuit of science for peaceful and beneficial aims.

NTI is also making a grant to establish at the World Health Organization in Geneva a revolving fund to support rapid emergency response to infectious disease outbreaks. The fund, which is created to provide instant funding in emergencies, will – after it has been spent down – be replenished by member organizations.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges we face in our thinking is to take account the full range of dangers and make sure our actions are goal-driven. We need a broad strategic plan for fulfilling the promise implied by President Bush last month in Washington, when he said: “Our highest priority is to keep terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.” Most people do not know that there is no international standard or requirement for the physical protection of nuclear material within a nation. Nations are free to select whatever level of security they may choose. And yet, that is not an internal issue. The worldwide system of security for nuclear materials is no stronger than the system of security at the weakest, worst-defended site, which in many cases amounts to no more than a poorly-paid, unarmed guard sitting inside a chain link fence. The theft of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons materials anywhere is a threat to everyone everywhere. We need to be guided by an overarching goal – one that was well expressed recently by NTI board member Senator Lugar in the Washington Post: “Every nation that has weapons and materials of mass destruction must account for what it has, safely secure what it has, and pledge that no other nation, cell or cause will be allowed access or use.”

**The fourth and final gap** we face is a gap between the threats and public awareness. We believe we will never close the gap between the threats and our response, until we close the gap between the threats and the public’s awareness of them.

Certainly those numbers are up now. But awareness of nuclear danger is not enough. We need to make the public aware of the steps need to reduce that danger. We at NTI seek to make the public aware, for example, that, as Sam Nunn likes to say: “Homeland security begins with securing weapons materials in Russia and other parts of the world.” It is the only way people can hold leaders accountable for their actions – both their acts of commission and omission.

If we don’t deepen public awareness and help channel it in the right direction, we could end up with the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of a million fallout shelters – that cost a lot of money, show a lot of activity, but don’t give any real security.

We’ve started grassroots public outreach in the United States with the first in a series of Town Meetings held on November 1, in Palo Alto, California. More than 375 people attended the forum  
(continued to page 72)

(Curtis from page 68)

and interacted with panelists on the issue of "Reducing the Threat from Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism: A Local Dialogue for Global Security." We are planning more meetings for 2002.

We make our specialists available to news reporters. We're exploring an effort to establish a public outreach/education agenda in Russia. And we have a website at [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org) to give people access to the facts about the threats from weapons of mass destruction. In under a month, we've had over 29,000 visitors from around the globe, including over 500 visitors from the Congress and Executive branches of the U.S. government.

We also have on our website an exclusive daily news service produced by National Journal that provides original reporting and a comprehensive snapshot of the day's global news on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and terrorism.

We also have a research library that builds on the most comprehensive nonproliferation databases in the world and brings together a range of expert opinion and analysis on these issues. We want to arm people with the facts so that these issues can be debated and understood beyond the small circle of policymakers and experts who specialize in them.

We at NTI believe it's a strong aspect of our mission to promote public awareness of these facts, because if people are not aware of the threats, and the steps necessary to reduce them, there will be no sustainable political will or reward for doing the right thing.

So these are some of the things we've been doing to close the gap between threat and response in organization, resources, thinking, and public awareness.

Promoting global security in this global age is a formidable task. We face a multiplicity of dangers and a near-infinite number of options. Our challenge is to find the most cost-effective, comprehensive means to defend against all our threats.

We face a daunting menu of urgent tasks. In sorting out priorities, the Initiative, like our government, must elevate facts above fear, and be sure that we are making the most of our resources.

This should start with an objective, comprehensive intelligence estimate that assesses each risk, ranks every threat, computes every cost and helps us devise a broad strategy that confronts the full range of significant dangers in a way that defends against one without making us more vulnerable to another. This approach would give the most weight and the most resources to threats that are the most immediate, the most likely, and the most potentially devastating. In the absence of an infinite budget, relative risk analysis must be the beginning point in shaping our strategy and allocating our resources – to defend our citizens at home and abroad.

This is a time of tragedy but an immense opportunity, where everything is up for discussion, and great change is possible. A

new cooperative relationship with Russia is within our grasp. Some were disappointed with the apparently thin results of the recent summit. But President Bush and President Putin are two leaders with more than three years left in their current terms, with many meetings ahead of them, and a strong relationship to build on.

President Bush and President Putin will be meeting again next year in Russia, perhaps as early as the spring. Secretary Powell was in Russia earlier this week, no doubt discussing nuclear arms reductions, the ABM Treaty and other matters of mutual concern. Whether those discussions will contribute to the development of a more fruitful cooperation or chill the opportunities so evident in the aftermath of September 11 remains to be seen.

But as a believer in redemption and in the essential logic of our, i.e. NTI's, approach to these matters I remain hopeful.

Let me close by suggesting some of the steps that would fulfill those hopes – actions that could be taken as early as the Bush-Putin summit next year in Russia:

1) Both President Bush and President Putin should commit each nation to a course that would ensure that our nuclear weapons and nuclear, chemical and biological weapons materials are safe, secure, and accounted for – with reciprocal monitoring sufficient to assure each other and the rest of the world that this is the case.

2) We need an agenda that does more than meet Russia's proliferation vulnerabilities. The United States and Russia have to lead. They should develop, by the time of the next summit, a joint plan for helping all nations with WMD capacity to "account for what they have, safely secure what they have, and pledge that no other nation, cell or cause will be allowed access or use."

3) Both Presidents should find a way to build on their commitments in Crawford – to speed the pace of reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons by both the U.S. and Russia without losing the transparency, verifiability and stability that are the benefits of traditional arms control.

4) Numbers are important, but what's even more important is that we find ways to reduce the risk of a catastrophic accident or miscalculation. Both Presidents should order their military leaders, in joint consultation and collaboration, to devise operational changes in the nuclear forces of both nations that would reduce toward zero the risk of accidental launch or miscalculation and provide increased launch decision time for each President. Such an order should emphasize that it is the intention of the U.S. and Russia to "stand down" their nuclear forces to the maximum extent practical consistent with the security interests of each country.

5) The two Presidents should get an accurate accounting and guarantee adequate safeguards for tactical nuclear weapons. Tactical nuclear weapons were never included in arms control treaties. As a consequence, we have no idea of Russia's inventory; we don't know how large it is; how secure it is; or where it is. And yet these are the nuclear weapons most attractive to terrorists – far

(continued to page 76)

*(Curtis from page 68)*

more valuable to them than simple fissile material, and much more portable than strategic warheads. And some can pack the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb. The relations between our two heads of state are as warm as they have ever been. Our perception of our common interest is closer than it has ever been. If this new trust is worth something, then it ought to be able to melt the suspicion that has kept us from the means we need to get an accurate accounting and confidence in the effective protection of these weapons.

6) The two Presidents should also give their blessing and support to a collaboration between the U.S. and Russian Academies of Sciences to address ways to reduce the threat from international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and then to expand that collaboration to include scientists in other nations.

7) The two Presidents should combine our biodefense knowledge and scientific expertise and apply these joint resources to defensive and peaceful biological purposes. The two Presidents could promote a bilateral effort to cooperate on our research agendas and build upon what both countries know. This is a research endeavor that could motivate others to join.

8) Finally, the two Presidents might link Russian and U.S. capabilities to provide for a joint response if weapons or materials ever get loose from the custody of either state or indeed from any nation.

A few months before September 11, a respected public opinion research group surveyed hundreds of Americans to determine a list of their top international concerns. Nuclear weapons were listed 11<sup>th</sup> out of 11 – cited by only 2% of those surveyed. Those numbers are no doubt higher today. The threat hasn't changed. The perception of the threat has changed, and the expectation of the public for action has changed. Our job is to take advantage of this change.

The people in this room have a far better sense than most of the dangers we face. You know that there are far more effective defenses to these threats than the ones we now have in place. For the sake of our future, the knowledge in this room shouldn't stay in this room. We all need to be part of forming an effective response to the dangers we face.

*(Charles B. Curtis, President and Chief Operating Officer of the Nuclear Threat Initiative presented this analysis at a seminar at the Brookings Institution on U.S. National Security Policy Issues in Washington, DC held December 12, 2001.)*

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