



**Sam Nunn**  
**Co-Chairman, Nuclear Threat Initiative**  
**Carnegie International Non-Proliferation Conference**  
**June 21, 2004**  
**“A New Triumph of Sanity”**

We are here today from around the world to discuss and identify ways to overcome grave threats to our security. My remarks will focus on our challenges, but it would be a mistake to ignore our successes – for they give us guidance and inspiration for the work ahead. Nearly 60 years have passed without a nuclear attack occurring anywhere in the world, in part because of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The International Atomic Energy Agency and its Director General El Baradei – after doing so much for so long with so little – are finally beginning to receive the added resources that their performance deserves and the task requires. They are doing an exceptional job.

U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham deserves our grateful recognition for his leadership in developing the \$450 million Global Threat Reduction Initiative he announced last month to secure, remove or dispose of vulnerable nuclear and radiological materials around the world. The Bush Administration deserves credit, along with the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, for Libya’s agreement to abandon its weapons of mass destruction programs, a significant step which we all hope will provide an example for others. Finally, the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, known in some quarters as Nunn-Lugar, has continued its valuable work led by Russia and the United States with help and cooperation from others, though many have correctly pointed out that the rising threat demands that this cooperative approach be accelerated and expanded.

As we look to the future, it may help to recall the past. In July of 1968, nine days after the NPT was opened for signature, President Lyndon Johnson urged the U.S. Senate to ratify the Treaty, calling it “a triumph of sanity and of man’s will to survive.” Today, we must seek a *new* triumph of sanity.

My focus today is on the persistent and increasing tension between the nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots under the NPT regime. This is an issue that threatens the global consensus that is the foundation of the NPT bargain. It also constrains U.S. and Russian capacity to exercise essential leadership on the world stage.

In the eyes of its critics, the Treaty enshrines the nuclear weapons inequalities that existed the day it was signed. As they see it, those who had nuclear weapons on that day get to keep them; those who didn’t don’t. Of course, as the Treaty itself declares, the way to move this double standard toward a single principle is for nuclear weapons nations to move toward nuclear disarmament. There can be endless argument about exactly what

this means and the timetable, but it must mean at least this: Nuclear weapons nations must visibly and steadily reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons. They are not.

Today, I urge the President of the United States and the President of Russia to author a new triumph of sanity and end their nations' Cold War nuclear force postures by removing their nuclear weapons from hair-trigger status – and step back from Mutual Assured Destruction.

We are running the irrational risk of an Armageddon of our own making. It is time to find a safer form of deterrence and security.

If both the United States and Russia remove nuclear weapons from hair-trigger status, we can immediately eliminate the threat of rapid assured destruction and dramatically reduce the chance of an accidental, mistaken, or unauthorized launch. By taking this step, we will de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons and make them less relevant. This is the rational security direction for the United States, for Russia and the world. This is the direction called for by the NPT. This is not the direction we're taking today.

### **Nuclear Non-proliferation – the Recent U.S.-Russian Record**

At a time when it serves U.S. and Russian security interests for the world to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons, both nations appear to be **re**-emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons.

Russia has explicitly done so. The United States, by its words and actions, has implicitly done so. Russia re-emphasized its reliance on nuclear weapons in its military doctrine; announced that the Topol long-range mobile missile – which some analysts believe will carry multiple warheads -- will become operational this year; indicated that it will begin designing a new long-range missile with multiple warheads; re-deployed tactical weapons to its borders, and pointedly withdrew its former pledge against first use of nuclear weapons.

On the U.S. side, the Administration has refused to consider the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. It has taken steps to advance the readiness of the Nevada Nuclear Weapons Test Site, and it has budgeted \$485 million over five years for the so-called bunker buster nuclear weapon. Last week, the Senate voted to include in the Pentagon budget nearly \$30 million for research on this weapon, and nearly \$10 million to study other nuclear weapons ideas, including so-called mini-nukes.

Finally, by not changing their hair-trigger posture either by agreement or bilateral action, the United States and Russia have made it clear that far from stepping back from nuclear confrontation, they reserve for themselves – and confer on each other – the right to maintain thousands of rapid launch nuclear weapons into the next decade and beyond.

With these policies, the United States and Russia -- whether they intend this message or not -- are telling the world that conventional weapons are not enough to ensure security; nuclear weapons -- ready for rapid launch -- are essential.

Many argue that these actions violate the spirit and perhaps the letter of Article VI NPT commitments. But even if there were no Article VI, and there were no NPT, it would still be in the United States and Russia's security interests to persuade other nations to forego reliance on nuclear weapons -- and it's hard to persuade other countries to move in one direction when we are moving in the other.

The United States has a muscular counter-proliferation strategy to fight the spread of nuclear weapons, and this is important. But force is not the only approach, and it must not become the first choice. Persuasion and economic leverage are essential. Of the many examples of nations giving up their nuclear weapons, or giving up their *quest* for nuclear weapons, in the vast majority of cases -- South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus -- it was diplomatic and economic actions, not military action, that achieved the result. Paradoxically, throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States were able to work effectively to dissuade their allies and others from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. In the aftermath of the Cold War, that effort and discipline have badly eroded. The U.S. and Russia must reestablish leadership in this crucial area of mutual interest.

Let me be clear: I am not saying that if we set a shining example by reducing our dependence on nuclear weapons that Iran and North Korea and others will suddenly see the light and abandon their nuclear programs. This is not likely, and it is not my point. I do believe, however, that if the United States and Russia de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons in our own security:

- It would immediately reduce the danger we pose to each other.
- It would give us more standing to encourage other nations to dismiss the nuclear option.
- It would also help build the international cooperation required to apply pressure on nations still *seeking* the nuclear option -- nations like Iran and North Korea, and rally the world to take essential steps in preventing catastrophic terrorism.

Where do we begin?

### **The Argument for Changing Force Postures**

President Reagan's former Undersecretary of Defense Fred Ikle observed that a man from Mars comparing the U.S. and Russian nuclear postures today with that of the height of the Cold War would find them essentially indistinguishable.

The Treaty of Moscow that Presidents Bush and Putin signed in 2002 did little to change this. The Treaty requires only that both parties reduce the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to the level of 1,700 -- 2,200 by the year 2012 -- and that limit is legally binding only for a brief moment before it expires.

The Treaty did nothing to address hair-trigger status, which in my view is the most dangerous element of our force posture. This means that in the year 2012 – twenty years after the end of the Cold War – the United States and Russia could each deploy roughly 2,000 nuclear weapons, ready to launch within minutes. This force structure can scarcely be described as “decreasing reliance on nuclear weapons.” It maintains heavy reliance, and in a way that courts catastrophe.

One year ago, the RAND Corporation – not known as apostles of disarmament – released a report that states: “The risks of nuclear use between the United States and Russia are too high given their markedly improved relationship. This is in part because nuclear weapons continue to play a role that is out of proportion with other aspects of that relationship.”

As the RAND study makes clear, we face the risk of an accidental or unauthorized launch of a nuclear ballistic missile, for three reasons:

- (1) The hair-trigger alert.
- (2) The economic and social problems in Russia, which have led to an increased reliance on nuclear weapons, a dramatic decline in survivable nuclear forces in Russia, and a Russian early warning system in serious disrepair.
- (3) The increasing capability of U.S. nuclear forces to deliver accurate and devastating strikes, which further decreases Russia’s confidence that its missiles could survive a first strike and thus increases pressure on Russia’s quick decisions and early launch.

These facts – if we don’t change them – could lead to a nightmare. Let’s consider this hypothetical example:

During the next hour, President Putin could be informed by the head of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces that their warning systems have picked up the signature of the launch of a United States nuclear missile heading toward Moscow.

President Putin would ask if the system could be sending a false warning. He would be told, “Yes, the warning could be false.”

He would ask if it is one missile or could be more. He would be told that the Russian warning system is badly eroded, so it appears to be one missile, but it could be a much larger attack.

He would ask: “Is it possible that an all-out attack could destroy nearly all our missiles and eliminate our ability to retaliate?” He would be told: “Yes.”

He would ask: “How much time do I have before I have to decide whether to launch our missiles or lose them?” He would be told: “Thirty minutes at most.”

I ask: Is this a sane posture for Russia, the United States and the world?

Of course, President Putin is smart, prudent, and sober – so he would consider other factors, including political relations, and hopefully he would conclude that he should not launch on warning. But the point remains that Russia maintains a nuclear force posture that is inherently unstable and therefore highly dangerous, and the U.S. force posture contributes to this danger.

Let me put it this way: If the nuclear force posture of the United States threatens Russia's ability to survive an attack, which in turn prompts Russia to rely even more heavily on a hair-trigger posture – does the U.S. force posture advance U.S. security -- or endanger it?

Are our weapons driving our policy? Have the machines taken over?

It is long past the time for our two countries to confront this issue. President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev understood the considerable risk of our force postures even for the hostile climate of the Cold War. In the U.S.-Soviet summit in 1986 at Reykjavik, President Reagan proposed to General Secretary Gorbachev that the two sides eliminate their land and sea-based offensive ballistic missiles. This would have left each side with nuclear bombers in their strategic arsenals, which unlike ballistic missiles take hours to reach their targets, and unlike missiles can be called back in mid-air. This would have had the effect of taking nuclear weapons off hair-trigger status and thus dramatically increasing decision time. There were questions about the feasibility of the proposal back then, and of course, questions exist today. But if President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev saw the need for removing hair-trigger status and found a basis for pursuing it even during the Cold War, certainly we ought to be able to find a way to do it 12 years after the Cold War. So far, however, it does not appear we are even looking.

I ask – if we both maintain a force that is assuredly survivable, why do we still need prompt launch capability with all of its attendant dangers? This question might be asked not just of the United States and Russia but all nuclear powers. Is it possible to envision a world where no nuclear state feels compelled to operationally deploy its nuclear weapons? Can we lead the world toward a delayed launch force posture that requires days or even weeks to launch missiles? In my view, we must. The more time the U.S. and Russia build into our process for ordering a nuclear strike, the more time is available to gather data, exchange information, gain perspective, discover an error, and avoid an accidental, mistaken or unauthorized launch. This would be a new triumph of sanity and the will to survive. As nuclear weapons become less immediate, they become less relevant and decreasing numbers become more feasible.

### **The Proposal: Take All Nuclear Weapons Off Hair-Trigger Status**

The bottom line for America and Russia -- keeping our nuclear weapons on hair trigger now increases the risk it was designed to reduce. President Bush knows this:

In the summer of 2000, in a speech titled: “New Leadership on National Security,” Presidential candidate George W. Bush said: “The Clinton-Gore administration has had over seven years to bring the U.S. force posture into the post-Cold War world. Instead, they remain locked in a Cold War mentality.”

Later in the same speech, Mr. Bush said: “The United States should remove as many weapons as possible from high-alert, hair-trigger status – another unnecessary vestige of Cold War confrontation. Preparation for quick launch – within minutes after warning of an attack – was the rule during the era of superpower rivalry. But today, for two nations at peace, keeping so many weapons on high alert may create unacceptable risks of accidental or unauthorized launch. So, as president, I will ask for an assessment of what we can safely do to lower the alert status of our forces.”

If this assessment has been requested or received, I missed it. But I have a proposal. Candidate Bush said we should remove “as many weapons as possible” from hair-trigger status. I propose that today “as many weapons as possible” should mean “all of them.” I urge the President of the United States and the President of Russia to order the military and defense officials of each country to present to the Presidents within six months a set of options for removing all nuclear weapons of both countries from hair-trigger status. These officials should jointly:

1. Determine what threats posed by the other side justify keeping any nuclear weapons on hair-trigger status.
2. Determine what steps the other side must take to remove those threats and thus end the justification for hair-trigger status.
3. Integrate these findings into proposed nuclear force postures that can assure the survivability of nuclear forces and end the need for quick launch capacity by either the United States or Russia.

The Presidents should then jointly adopt an approach and a timetable to get the job done and challenge other nuclear nations to follow this lead. If the defense establishments say they cannot, we need clear and convincing answers why not. In this post-Cold War political climate, the burden of proof must shift to those who insist on maintaining the hair-trigger posture in Russia and in the United States.

### **Interim Options for Changing Force Postures**

Some may ask -- if the legacy of mistrust is too great to accomplish these sensible moves toward assured survival in a single step, what is Plan B? Let me pose three interim options that would at least move us strongly in the right direction.

1. Our leaders could immediately order that the warheads on each side that are scheduled to be taken out under the Treaty of Moscow be taken off alert.

There is precedent for this kind of action. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush stood down forces scheduled to be reduced under the START I Treaty. As he announced his decision to the nation from the White House in the fall of 1991, he said: “Today, America must lead ... Let them say that we led where destiny required us to lead, to a more peaceful, hopeful future.” We should take inspiration and guidance from his example, and stand down those warheads without delay.

2. *Our leaders could limit the number of hair-trigger status warheads each side can deploy.*

Both sides could limit the number of warheads on hair-trigger status to several hundred as part of a tiered posture. This posture would have a first tier with a limited number of weapons on hair-trigger status, a second tier with delayed response of days or perhaps weeks, and a third tier that required longer periods to be brought back to readiness. The idea would be to move most of our strategic force to the second and third tier.

The lower number of weapons with prompt launch capability would sharply reduce any chance that either side could launch a first strike that would totally eliminate the other side’s weapons – thus improving the assured survivability of forces. This approach, while not yet removing all missiles from hair-trigger status, would reduce the pressure on the U.S. and Russian triggers, and reduce concern that the other side would pull the trigger on warning.

This idea has been developed in a study led by Dr. Sergei Rogov, Director of the Institute for U.S. and Canada Studies in Moscow. Dr. Rogov will present more details about this option later today at this conference, and we should all listen carefully. The Rogov proposal deserves our serious discussion, and it deserves the full attention of President Bush and President Putin.

3. *Our leaders could eliminate the hair trigger for one leg of the triad on each side.*

Since the United States and Russia emphasize different legs of the triad, each side could choose a different approach. The U.S. might choose to remove all warheads, or otherwise eliminate the hair trigger, for its land-based missiles. Russia might choose to do the same for its sea-based missiles.

This would take into account the realities of current U.S. and Russian strategic force postures, where the U.S. relies more heavily on its sea-based missiles and Russia places more emphasis on its land-based missiles.

If the two nations were to take this step, each would reduce its total number of nuclear weapons by roughly 2,000. In a second step, each side would agree to reduce its weapons on hair-trigger status to 500 or even lower so that the remaining U.S. force deployed at sea would be insufficient to eliminate Russia’s land-based missiles. The Russian missiles, of course, would be incapable of eliminating the U.S. submarine force.

This posture would be designed to assure that the nuclear weapons of both sides would be survivable, which would reduce the pressure to launch on warning, and thus increase decision times for both nations' leaders.

These are just three possible steps. I am confident that the best minds in our defense establishments, under clear Presidential direction, can find other innovative and perhaps more attractive approaches. As we explore interim options, we must not lose sight of the goal – it is not just to *reduce* the number of weapons on hair trigger. The goal must be to remove every U.S. and Russian nuclear weapon from hair-trigger status – and thereby end the option of quick launch and the threat of rapid destruction of entire nations in minutes.

If, indeed, both presidents agree to order their defense establishments to explore these options or others, they should announce that intention in advance of the NPT Review Conference scheduled for early next year – to show the world that the United States and Russia are serious about reducing their arsenals and their reliance on nuclear weapons.

Let me acknowledge that removing nuclear weapons from hair-trigger status will not end the ability of the two sides to destroy each other. As long as we have even a few hundred warheads on each side, we're going to have the capacity for Mutual Assured Destruction. But there are two reasons to press on: First, even though our destructive force will remain mutual and assured, if we have no weapons on hair-trigger status, the decision to launch will be slower, more deliberate and far less likely. It was Thomas Jefferson who wrote: "When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry, a hundred." Jefferson understood the value of increasing decision time. I suspect he would advise us to count even higher than a hundred before launching a nuclear missile.

Second, removing weapons from hair-trigger status is an essential first step in coming out from under the shadow of Mutual Assured Destruction toward an expanded doctrine of "Mutual Assured Safety," an idea first advanced by former U.S. Defense Secretary Bill Perry. Under this approach, both the United States and Russia would shift their nuclear weapons doctrine from one that 'seeks security by threatening destruction' toward one that 'seeks security by threat reduction.' It is hard to justify doing anything else.

In closing, let's imagine that our man from Mars at some point in the future were to dig into the rubble after a nuclear catastrophe. Would he explain the devastation in the same way we explain the decline of other species: "too slow in adapting to a changing environment?" We must avoid this epitaph.

Let history show instead that in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the United States and Russia took dramatic steps to change our force postures and remove our nuclear weapons from hair-trigger status. Let history show that we reduced the chance of a disastrous catastrophic mistake; that we showed the world that we were reducing our reliance on nuclear weapons; and that we generated the good will we needed to gain the



cooperation of each other and other nations in preventing nuclear dangers and catastrophic terrorism.

Will we adapt in time? It comes down to a question of how we use our strength. If we use our strength only to increase our dominance, we will chase away the partners we need to protect ourselves. If, however, we use our strength to help create a world that makes all nations safer, then other nations are more likely to help make us safer. This is a simple calculation, but a humble one, and humility does not come easily to the strong.

It is not too late. If we can score a new triumph of sanity, we still have a chance to achieve the vision of President Kennedy: “not a new balance of power, but a new world of law, where the strong are just, and the weak secure, and the peace preserved.” Thank you.