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**“PREVENTING NUCLEAR TERRORISM:
OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY – ISN’T”**

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

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Good morning, and thank you for meeting at this early hour, and for your faith that I may have brought a message worth waking up for.

I once heard the advice of a renowned writer and speaker who said: “I try to get one of two reactions from my audience. I want them to say: ‘Gee, I never knew that’ or ‘Gee, I never thought of it that way.’”

This is a very sophisticated group – I’m not sure I can meet that threshold with the people in this room. So my goals for today are slightly revised. My hope instead is to get more people here and elsewhere to repeat often and energetically the main points I want to make today.

- 1) Nuclear terrorism is the greatest threat to our national security.
- 2) We are not treating this threat with the urgency it demands or acting as effectively as we must.

Of course, you may already know that. This message may sound like one you’ve heard before, and perhaps it is one you yourselves have expressed before.

My first assertion – that nuclear terrorism is the greatest threat to our security – is a point that is not just accepted, but echoed, by almost everyone who has held a microphone or a pen to speak or write on the matter.

In November, 2001, two months after 9/11 and in the first year of his first term, President Bush said: “Our highest priority is to keep terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.” According to *The Washington Post*, after the President was briefed on Al Qaeda’s nuclear plans in that same month, he ordered his national security team to “give nuclear terrorism priority over every other threat to the United States.”

The National Security Strategy of the United States, released by the Bush Administration one year later in September of 2002, reads: “We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction.” Earlier the Strategy to Combat Nuclear Terrorism laid out a sound plan for countering the danger.

In 2004, Vice President Cheney told the World Affairs Council in California: “Remembering what we saw on 9/11, and knowing the nature of these enemies, we have as clear a responsibility as could ever fall to government: *We must do everything in our power* to keep terrorists from gaining weapons of mass destruction.”

I could not agree more, nor could I use better words. But we are not doing “everything in our power.”

I recently served on an independent review panel co-chaired by Bob Joseph – the author of many of those words while serving on the National Security Council in this Administration – and Ash Carter, an Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton Administration. During the course of our examination of the government’s response to the threat from weapons of mass destruction (WMD), we had access to and examined the President’s National Security Directives and were briefed by all the important players in our Nation’s defense against catastrophic terrorism. Among our conclusions: “DOD and the U.S. Government as a whole have not fully implemented [the National Strategies articulated in Presidential guidance]. Performance has fallen short in all three pillars of the National Strategy to Combat WMD: prevention; protection; and response.” Why is that? I have often pondered this question. It is not because we misapprehend the danger.

If a 10-kiloton nuclear device goes off in mid-town Manhattan, or any major city on a typical workday, it could kill hundreds of thousands in a single stroke. The loss of life would not be the only impact. The world’s interdependent economy could suffer a disabling blow – damaging the weakest economies the most. Depending on where the strike occurred, global cash flows and global investment could be retarded for a generation, if not longer. After the explosion, numerous groups would warn that there are nuclear weapons planted in other cities, and make all manner of threats to influence America’s behavior in the world or simply to roil and disrupt the U.S. economy.

But the alarming thing is not the destructive effects of a nuclear attack, but the likelihood of such an attack, which is a lot higher than most people have let themselves believe. After the publication of the 9/11 report, NBC’s Tim Russert asked 9/11 Commission chair Thomas Kean if he thought there was a real possibility of a nuclear attack on an American city in his lifetime. Governor Kean said: “We talked to nobody who had studied this issue who didn’t think it was a real possibility.”

Both former defense secretary and NTI Board Member William Perry and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Graham Allison believe the probability of a terrorist nuclear attack is more than 50% over the next ten years. I think it is less than that, but still unacceptably high.

In 2006, Matthew Bunn, a Harvard researcher whose work is supported by NTI, published a mathematical model that took into account relevant factors such as: availability of nuclear materials, security of those materials, desire of terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons, capability of terrorists to build a nuclear weapon – and then, based on that data, calculated a 29% probability of a terrorist nuclear attack over the next ten years.

While the report acknowledges the uncertainty in such an estimate, the author did testify before Congress that “the danger of nuclear terrorism is high enough to have a significant effect on the life expectancy of everyone who lives or works in downtown Washington or midtown Manhattan.” (Emphasis supplied.)

Yet, that assertion actually understates the threat. If our society suffers a nuclear terror attack, we will suffer not only a disastrous loss of life, but also a catastrophic loss of civil liberty with grave implications for the future of freedom in our society. A nuclear terror attack is a threat not just to life, but to our way of life. It threatens the soul of the free society it has taken us more than 200 years to build.

With so much at stake, citizens have every reason to ask: “Are we doing all we can to prevent a nuclear attack?” The straightforward answer is “no, we are not.” And for this audience in particular, the question follows: “why not?”

The right things have been said and everyone has said them – but we are still dangerously not matching words with deeds. We still have not organized the work of our government to follow through on our duty to keep the world’s most dangerous weapons out of terrorist hands.

The threats

Where are the key sources of the terrorist nuclear threat in the world today? Let me quickly list them out.

Russia has the world’s largest stockpiles of weapons and materials – spread across the greatest geographical range, in the largest number of buildings, many of which still have inadequate security. There remains a serious threat of insider-efforts to steal nuclear materials, and security also must be designed to withstand a large-scale attack of the type that led to the Beslan school massacre.

Pakistan has a much smaller – but still significant – stockpile of nuclear weapons and weapons materials. Elements of the military and intelligence services are known to have Al Qaeda sympathies. This may be the greatest known nuclear danger. And, of course, we have the dangers of a nuclear-armed North Korea and the destabilizing effects of the nuclear weapons ambitions of Iran with which to contend.

In addition, there are some 130 research facilities in 40 countries around the world that use highly enriched uranium as their fuel. The global chain of nuclear security is only as strong as its weakest link, and some of these sites are secured by nothing more than an unarmed guard and a chain link fence. This danger is known but insufficiently addressed because it is diffuse. The materials are often in the possession of friends, not enemies. But this diffusion, this ambiguous quality of the danger, makes it all the more threatening because very small quantities of insufficiently secured materials pose a danger. Here our friends are as much a problem as our enemies – perhaps more.

Today we are witnessing the spread of nuclear technology and capacities around the world without the disciplines, controls or enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure that spread is peacefully purposed.

And lastly, and most importantly, this inventory of nuclear dangers is made all the more concerning by the persistence of a reconstituted Al Qaeda intent on acquiring nuclear weapons to inflict maximum harm on the U.S. and its allies.

Some commentators have recently said that our preventive efforts have to be spread up and down the chain of the nuclear threat, so that we position ourselves to stop the terrorist pathway to the bomb at every step. I think, frankly, such an approach is non-strategic, and overstates our ability to stop the terrorist bomb once the terrorists have control of nuclear material. While I agree with the idea of a layered defense, I do not believe in trying for zero defects in each layer of the defense. Even in nature, successful species prioritize their defensive efforts and resources. So must we.

The most effective, least expensive way to prevent nuclear terrorism is to secure nuclear weapons and materials at the source. Acquiring weapons and materials is the hardest step for the terrorists to take and the easiest step for us to stop. By contrast, every subsequent step in the process – building the bomb, transporting it, and detonating it – is easier for the terrorists to take, and harder for us to stop.

The defense against catastrophic terrorism must begin with securing, to the highest standard, weapons and fissile materials in every country and every facility that has them -- to keep them out of terrorist hands.

Unfortunately, and – to my mind – incredibly, there is no comprehensive list of the world's nuclear sites ranked according to their vulnerability. We are still largely scheduling security upgrades and material cleanout on an opportunity basis, not on a comprehensive strategic and tactical assessment of danger. Last month, the Senate received word that this assessment is underway – but is not yet complete. This status report comes nearly seven years after President Bush declared it a priority to keep nuclear weapons out of terrorist hands.

I don't mean to minimize the work that has been and is being done. Many patriots in our government and in our contractor community have sacrificed and worked incredibly hard in adverse circumstances to counter this danger. I applaud them, as should you. Much has been accomplished by the Department of Energy (particularly under Sam Bodman's and Will Tobey's leadership) and by the Departments of State, Justice and Defense.

Our government has launched a Global Threat Reduction Initiative to address the vulnerable nuclear materials scattered throughout the world and a Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism co-chaired by the United States and Russia which now has around 70 participant countries. Both are staffed by dedicated, hard working individuals, but both are badly under-resourced. The Global Threat Reduction Initiative has less

federal manpower than a light infantry rifle company. U.S. participation in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism is staffed by around two dozen State Department employees. The Global Initiative itself lacks a staff secretariat. The Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) has more resources and a greater scope of program activity. However, the Joseph/Carter Review Panel tells us that DTRA's "component activities are not well defined." DTRA lacks prominence in the Department of Defense and is also under-funded and under-staffed.

So, yes, we are acting. But we sometimes appear to be acting as if we have a deal with the terrorists that they won't start trying to smuggle or steal weapons or materials until 2010 or 2015 or later. We don't have such a deal. They're looking *now*.

Recommended steps

In my view, the next President should accelerate our response to this urgent threat with four priority steps:

- One - To regain leadership momentum, initiate a joint enterprise among nuclear weapons states to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons globally, and, beginning with the U.S. and Russia, take concrete and transparent actions to change our Cold War postures and reduce weapons inventories. In parallel, the U.S. should incent a broader, more effective cooperation of nuclear weapons and non-nuclear weapons states to prevent Iran and other states from pursuing nuclear weapons ambitions. (I see these actions as mutually reinforcing, so I have paired them in one step.)
- Two - Secure all nuclear weapons usable plutonium and highly enriched uranium to the highest standards by promoting best practices and giving technical assistance to any and all states with nuclear capacity to apply "appropriate, effective control" to these materials.
- Three - Limit the spread of nuclear weapons technology by putting in place a system of reliable fuel assurances to support peaceful uses of nuclear power.
- Four - Gain agreement on and implement a multi-state effort to strengthen progressive Islamic regimes and progressive Islamic societal elements and address the root causes of the discontent underlying the virulent forms of radical Islam.

These four priority commitments should be at the center of a new administration's attempt to reduce nuclear dangers.

I will be happy to discuss with you how each might best be pursued. But first, I want to make an "inside baseball" point appropriate to this Capitol Hill setting.

If we are to have any chance of delivering on our duties to keep America safe from nuclear terrorism, a new Administration and a new Congress will each have to change its ways and change how they have organized to address this danger.

The Administration

First, let me start with the Administration.

Our next President most likely will enter office with no high-level position established for coordinating efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism or to prevent terrorism by other means of mass destruction. The Departments of Defense, State, Justice, Homeland Security and Energy, and the intelligence services, all have *some* responsibility for preventing nuclear terrorism, but they each have different pieces of the equation, and these pieces have proved exceedingly difficult to coordinate. If you were to add the biological threat, you would add Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Commerce, with its export control responsibility, should probably be a part of every equation. To say that all of these departments and agencies have trouble playing well together would be an understatement.

I believe until there is a senior official with direct access to the President who has specific and singular responsibility for coordinating the efforts to keep nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction out of terrorist hands, we will not get the action we need.

This idea isn't new. We at NTI have advocated it for seven years. The 9/11 Commission recommended this be done. A bill calling for a senior official to coordinate our collective efforts was introduced in the Congress, passed both Houses and was signed by the President on August 3, 2007. It's the law. But it's not enough to have a law. That appointment has yet to be made – nearly nine months after the law took effect. And it's not enough to have a senior coordinator either. We need the organizational structure and the strategic planning capability that would allow the coordinator to make the right decisions and to get the job done. We do not now have that either.

To deal with the issue of nuclear terrorism, we need a centralized means in the Office of the President to set priorities, assign responsibilities, ensure resources, and hold people to account. But we can't do that without a dynamic strategic plan – and the tools to rewrite that plan to respond to shifting circumstances. We can't do that without complex contingency planning. We lack a genuine and robust strategic planning capability in the Executive Office of the President – and we desperately need it.

Moreover, it is no longer enough to advise. In my view, a Coordinator for the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism must assume, with the President's permission and authority, more of a director's role to address complex problems that cross multiple agencies and departments. In the case of the "coordinator," this President could put such capacity in place with a single stroke, but disputes over Constitutional prerogatives sadly will probably leave it to the next President.

As an aside, I should mention that the President made no comment on the coordinator position when HR 1 was signed into law. However, we know from a January 2007 Statement of Administration Policy, the White House opposed the creation of this position saying, “The position is unnecessary given extensive coordination and synchronization mechanisms that now exist within the executive branch, including the September 2006 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism which sets forth a comprehensive multi-layered strategy to combat the threat of WMD terrorism.”

Unfortunately, the White House statement misses the point. The problem is not with the President’s guidance, but with the follow-through. And we know from the now public conclusions of the Joseph/Carter Review Panel that performance has fallen short in all pillars of our strategy.

To the next President I would say: Mr. President, you need the person provided for in HR 1 and recommended by the 9/11 Commission – a coordinator with your direct authority and a scope to act across departmental and agency lines. And Mr. President, you need to make crystal clear that this person acts with your authority and you will insist on operational follow-through to your security guidance. Because the planning, organization and policies necessary to deal effectively with the threat from weapons of mass destruction are inextricably intertwined with foreign and national security policy, this position must be placed in the national security structure of the office of the President. This presents complications which are not insurmountable in my view. However, to the Congress and to the President, I would say, don’t get in a Constitutional stand-off about whether this person is appointed with the Senate’s advice and consent. The danger is too great; the need too imperative. Let’s get on with the job.

The Congress

And now for the Congress. None (or almost none) of the Congressional organization recommendations of the 9/11 Commission were adopted. Why not? Are there good reasons? Or are the ties and politics of “business as usual” too great? It is clear to many outside observers that Congress has too many committees with overlapping jurisdictional claims and holds too many repetitive hearings, both of which impair effective oversight. In addition, as is probably reflective of a deep frustration with its own inability to get a sense of what’s going on due to this diffusion of jurisdictional responsibilities, the Congress is often abusive of governmental witnesses who hold the title “honorable” but are seldomly treated as such. All of this is discouraging new entrants to the work of government, particularly in appointive office, and making difficult our capacity to retain and refresh the talent pool. Government is losing capabilities across a broad range of its responsibilities.

Congress too often micromanages the monies entrusted to the executive, makes coordinated action across departments and agencies difficult, and constrains personnel and resource flexibility and efficiency. Yet with all of its controls, investigations and hearings, Congress is failing in its responsibility to hold the executive to account, and the

most important issues are lost in a fog of activity which passes for Congressional oversight.

This fog obscures the really important events. Just one month ago, Senators Lieberman and Collins held an important hearing to assess the threat of nuclear terrorism before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. This hearing received virtually no notice from their colleagues and almost none from the media, certainly none from what passes for the “major media.” Our political leadership has declared nuclear terrorism to be the number one threat to U.S. and international security. Neither the Executive nor Congressional branches of our government appear to be acting as if this is the case.

What’s the answer? I would suggest this is a matter that the Executive and Congressional branches of our government need to work on together at the very outset of the next administration and the next Congress. More than 50 years ago, in recognition of the unique danger and potential benefits of the atom, the Congress organized itself into a Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. It was authoritative, respected, managed classified information well and exercised great influence on the executive as well as colleagues in the House and Senate. Perhaps that model would be appropriate to manage today’s number one security danger. Perhaps that model would provide truly effective and responsible Congressional oversight. The 9/11 Commission thought so, and I think so.

Of course, this is a matter for Congressional leaders to decide. I want to emphasize the term “leaders.” It is time for Congressional leaders to stand up and insist that the Congress reorganize itself to provide strong, capable and stable oversight, become an insistent conscience on behalf of the American people, and administer the power of the purse in a manner that enables our government to act effectively and in a timely manner to deal with this existential danger.

Demand

A final point. If we want to do everything possible to prevent nuclear terrorism, we cannot confine our work to organizational reform and control of the supply-side, to block access to nuclear weapons and materials. We must also try to cut the ‘demand’ for nuclear weapons – and that means we have to learn how to defuse hatred and forge a broad common defense.

No nation – no matter how strong – can provide or assure its own security in today’s world. We need the help of others – and particularly, we need the cooperation of the developing world. However, we can’t expect cooperation from the developing world by merely saying we are all at risk of terrorism, and then continue to act as if only they – and not we – are at risk from poverty and disease. We will never get their cooperation in addressing *our* concerns, unless they see us cooperating to address *their* concerns. The United States must work diligently to regain its credibility as a country that can act in the cause of common security and for the common good – if it is to have the authority to call the world to more urgent action in defense of nuclear terror.

At the same time, let's not make the mistake of assigning all responsibility for anti-American hatred from elements of the Muslim world to our policies or to their poverty or oppression. There are many people in the world who suffer poverty and deprivation far greater than what is commonly experienced in the Muslim world, and they don't hate the United States. The truth is, anti-U.S. hatred is a virus spread in certain Muslim societies very intentionally through schools, textbooks, sermons and various other attempts to influence the mindset of society – and ultimately to bring us harm.

We must address this hatred much more effectively than we have so far managed to do – not because it is legitimate, but because it is dangerous. This requires a strong effort to end the organized, oftentimes state-supported preaching of hatred against Israel, against the West and against the United States in particular.

It is in our national interest to achieve constructive relations with the Islamic world, to achieve peace in the Middle East, to achieve a stable Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. And thus we have the right to know, and the responsibility to act, if governments are supporting or permitting the organized spread of hatred that will make achieving these national security goals difficult or even impossible. This will prove to be a quintessential challenge to our diplomacy. It is a challenge we must meet.

The entire noble effort of nonproliferation and threat reduction is really, in my view, an effort to buy time. As technology advances, nuclear weapons will become easier to make, not harder. So the desire to make them, must become less, not more. With the advance of science, smaller and smaller numbers of people will gain the means to harm larger and larger numbers of people. We have to learn how to defuse hatred before it can acquire the tools to express itself explosively and catastrophically. This may prove to be our most essential defense expenditure.

Conclusion

Former Senator Sam Nunn, the co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, often summarizes his message on the nuclear threat by asking:

If a nuclear weapon explodes tonight in Washington, New York, London, Moscow, Tokyo or anywhere in the world, what would we wish we had done to prevent it? Why aren't we doing that now?

There's another form of that query I would pose to the people in this room – one that asks: if a nuclear weapon goes off somewhere in the world today, what would we wish we had *said* to prevent it? Why aren't we saying that now? This morning I am trying to say it. It is not a hopeful or confident message, but it is my duty to say these words nonetheless.

In the Executive branch, we need to ask – who is in charge? Who bears the responsibility for protecting this country from the acknowledged number one threat to our

security and to our way of life? And in the Congress, we need to ask – who is responsible for effective oversight of this vital work? And in both branches, we need to ask – how are we organized to discharge these duties? I have the honor to have held five presidential appointments subject to Senate confirmation, and I worked on the Hill as a professional staff member for a major Congressional Committee for six years. I love and respect my government and the people who work for it – BUT I have no adequate answer to these questions.

So, I conclude with the words I started out these remarks. We are not treating this threat with the urgency it demands or acting as effectively as we must. We who know and we who care must insist on a more effective governmental response to this danger than we are now getting.

Thank you.