

# Zero Nuclear Weapons

*Max M. Kampelman*

I CONSIDER IT A PRIVILEGE to be in your company and I know that we all consider it a privilege to have been invited here by George Shultz and Sidney Drell to note and evaluate the significance of the Reykjavik Summit twenty years ago between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, both of whom agreed that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

It is essential, as I rise to address you, that you be aware of my reluctant view that neither of our two national political parties today has demonstrated the capacity to govern our society in this period of international crisis. I, therefore, turn to this audience of scientists and experts for guidance.

It is more than fifty-five years since I took leave from my college teaching to spend three months assisting the newly elected Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota to organize his office—and I am still in Washington. During my teaching days, Gunnar Myrdahl published his massive study of the Negro in America. His dominant perception was the realization that wherever he went in our country, he noted a common theme—that of the principles of the Declaration of Independence. I then asked my students to recall that at the time the Declaration was adopted we had slavery, no legal equality for

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women, and property qualification for voting. I could envision the practical politician of that era saying: “This is no time for these unrealistic dreams. We are fighting a war for our independence as a nation. Don’t mix us up. We are losing the war. Get out of our way. Slavery has been with us since the beginning of time—even the Bible tells us that.”

The practical politicians of that era may have arguably “won” the argument, but the “ought” of the Declaration has clearly overcome the “is” of that day. The political movement of the “is” to the “ought” has made our American democracy the country we cherish today. The “ought” has been and is central to our place in world history. We must not minimize the “ought.” I suggest to you that our role in the world must be to establish a civilized “ought” for human beings—the abolition of weapons of mass destruction. The alternative is chaos and unimaginable destruction.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter unexpectedly asked me to head our American delegation at a Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting of thirty-five countries in Madrid under the Helsinki Final Act. During the time that I was considering the offer, a former secretary of state, a friend, invited me to breakfast and urged me not to accept the responsibility, primarily because the Helsinki process was initiated by the Soviet Union in an effort to undermine NATO. But I read the Helsinki agreement and found it to be an extremely fine example of standards that should guide the human race. This was an opportunity to move the “is” of Europe to the agreed upon “ought.” With the leadership of Shultz and Reagan, the three-year meeting totally changed the face of Europe and contributed to the destruction of the Soviet system. Here was a demonstration of a successful political process that helped to move the “is” of Eastern Europe to the “ought.”

In 1985, President Reagan, Secretary of State Shultz, and

## Zero Nuclear Weapons

99

Secretary of Defense Weinberger asked me to head up our negotiating team with the Soviet Union on intermediate-range nuclear forces, the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, and missile defense. The reopening of the talks in Geneva were associated with an agreement that President Reagan and President Gorbachev would meet at a get-acquainted summit to take place in Geneva in November.

President Reagan, on his return to Washington, called a meeting of his advisors, which I attended. This was the meeting where he announced to his officials, "Maggie was right. We can do business with this man." In reporting on the substance of his talks, the president informed his staff that he had suggested to Gorbachev that it would be desirable if the negotiations could abolish nuclear weapons. It is my recollection that this news was treated with intense respectful opposition by his advisors. The president politely listened. His response to their concerns did not come until the second summit that took place in Iceland where he repeated his "zero" offer to Gorbachev and where they came close to an agreement.

Upon my return to Washington, I received a telephone call from a senior senator who asked me whether the reports were accurate on the issue of zero nuclear weapons. I said those reports were accurate, and it was clear to me the senator, a Democrat, was relieved the meeting had adjourned without an agreement.

Frankly, at that time I did not feel qualified to have a position on the issue. My instincts were with the president's objective of going to zero, but I also highly respected the fact that the experts whom I knew and worked with said that going to zero could endanger our security and that our possession of nuclear weapons was a strong deterrent against international irresponsibility.

A recent United Nations report co-authored by Bill Perry,

who is with us today, tells us that at least forty countries are today at different stages of developing their capacity to produce nuclear weapons and that more than 27,000 nuclear weapons potentially threaten our survival.

Today, I fear for the safety of my children and my grandchildren. It is this deep concern that motivates me to explore the issue and revive the Reagan objective of zero nuclear weapons. I have discussed my concerns with friends and former associates whose experience and training in this area are far more extensive than mine. Many join me in the conclusion that we must find a way to save ourselves and our children and grandchildren from the destruction that threatens us. It is this concern that presents us at this meeting with a serious challenge.

The United States and five other nations are now engaged in a diplomatic effort to convince North Korea to abandon their nuclear weapons program. The United States and a group of European nations are also in negotiations with Iran over their nuclear activities. I am not optimistic that either of these two negotiations will succeed; moreover, I fear that even if they do succeed, our success may be only temporary.

Indeed, the argument “The five permanent members of the Security Council have the bomb; India and Pakistan have it; Israel has it; what right do you have to tell us that we’re of a lower grade as a nation and that we can’t have it” is a powerful one. If North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, can Japan and South Korea be persuaded not to follow? If Iran develops nuclear weapons, will Turkey or Egypt or Saudi Arabia not follow?

I have concluded that the current diplomat path focusing only on the nuclear potential of North Korea and Iran is unlikely to stop either nuclear program or deal conclusively with the issues of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. If we

## Zero Nuclear Weapons

101

are to give our diplomats a fighting chance and avoid the use of our military, it will be necessary to look for new means of guidance and enforcement.

It is increasingly clear to me that President Reagan was correct in urging a zero objective. What is needed today is a “Reagan-esque” initiative designed to enlarge the diplomatic canvas so that all nations can be convinced that the global elimination of nuclear weapons is in their national interest. The elimination of all nuclear arms is an “ought” that must be proclaimed and energetically pursued. It is time for us to get behind that essential “ought” and shape it into a realistic “is.” We must learn from the events of September 11 that we are vulnerable—and will become increasingly vulnerable. The need for eliminating nuclear arms is today even more compelling, twenty years after Reykjavik.

It is we who must take the lead because, simply put, the United States is the world’s predominant power with more deployed nuclear weapons than any other country. As the world’s predominant power, it is in our national interest and our responsibility to prevent the emergence of new strategic or regional nuclear adversaries and to prevent the acquisition of a nuclear weapon by terrorists. There is today no alternative if we wish to secure the safety of our nation and of our families other than the elimination of all nuclear weapons globally, along with all other weapons of mass destruction, including biological and chemical weapons.

It is urgent that the United States exercise the global, moral, and political leadership necessary to address these related nuclear threats. It is consistent with our principles as a nation and with our modern history. In 1945, President Harry Truman joined his British and Canadian colleagues in calling for “entirely eliminating the use of atomic energy for destructive purposes.” In 1952, President Dwight D. Eisenhower of-

ferred at the United Nations his Atoms for Peace proposal. As a matter of fact, the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and China are bound under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to achieve nuclear disarmament “under strict and effective international control.” Yet the United Nations tells us that there are 27,000 nuclear weapons in the world!

We cannot wish away the awful threat from nuclear weapons to the survival of the human race; but we must not resign ourselves to a nuclear disaster. We must as a nation look upon Reykjavik as a vital stepping-stone toward a rational and effective world effort to escape catastrophe and extermination.

The president of the United States, after appropriate consultation, should personally appear and propose to the United Nations that the General Assembly call for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. This must be our and the world’s indispensable rational objective—the “ought” for the world and the human race. It should then simultaneously direct the Security Council—working with other key states, in particular, other nuclear-capable states such as Israel, India, and Pakistan—to develop effective political and technical procedures to achieve this goal, including stringent verification and severe penalties to prevent cheating by irresponsible nations and groups. Total isolation—political, economic, and cultural—must be developed to punish those criminal states that attempt to violate the “ought” adopted by the United Nations. States found to be criminal states should also lose their right to vote or participate in any way in any of the bodies within the United Nations.

In addition, all countries with weapons-grade plutonium and uranium should be required to sell their weapons-grade material to a new United Nations Bank, which would turn that dangerous material into energy available to be sold to energy-starved states in the world. It is relevant here to note that Sen-

ator Richard Lugar supports a proposal by Professor Ash Carter consistent with this objective; and just last month, the Nuclear Threat Initiative headed by former Senator Sam Nunn committed 50 million dollars toward the creation of a fuel bank administered by the IAEA.

Some may agree with the goal, but understandably question the wisdom of pursuing it at the United Nations. When President Truman went to San Francisco to address the final meeting of the United Nations Conference, he said, quite simply, that the charter of the United Nations was “a solid structure upon which we can build a better world.”

Consistent with this vision, our General Assembly resolution should embrace the objective of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction globally and call on the Security Council to develop the means of doing so. We would thereby accomplish two essential objectives. First, a stamp of legitimacy by all nations would be firmly imprinted on the process and established as a goal in the minds of peoples of the world.

Second, by moving the means for action to the arena of the Security Council, we would ensure the process’s taking place in a forum where the United States has, by virtue of its veto, the power to protect our interests.

To achieve the objective of a world without nuclear weapons, the Security Council will need a step-by-step process. The steps must be building blocks, not stumbling blocks; and they must be taken with urgency, not complacency. Each step should build both trust and experience that paves the way toward subsequent steps necessary for the elimination of all nuclear weapons globally, including essential verification to address the issue of cheating. One of the issues I hope we begin to come to grips with here at this conference is what these specific steps might include.

Do I expect that Russia will join us in this effort to restore

sanity to the world? I do not know. Do I expect that China will refrain from exercising its veto within the Security Council and thereby try to defeat our efforts toward world sanity? I do not know.

What I do know is that an effort by us toward sanity will communicate to the world that we Americans—descendants of Russians and Chinese and Africans and Latinos and Indians and Germans and French—all of us are part of an effort to achieve human dignity and peace and that this is what America represents and seeks for all the peoples of the world. We do have the sword, but we seek a world without swords. We have the capacity to win wars, but we do not want to fight wars.

It is essential that we lead the world into developing a decisive move away from the “is”—a world with an increasing risk of catastrophe—and work toward achieving peace and stability. It was President John Kennedy who said, “. . . the world was not meant to be a prison in which man awaits his execution. . . . The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us.” It was President Reagan who called for the abolishment of “all nuclear weapons,” which he considered to be “totally irrational, totally inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on Earth and civilization.”

The world knows this. It is time for us to act.



### Statements by Past Presidents

#### President Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Truly if the genius of mankind that has invented the weapons of death cannot discover the means of preserving peace, civilization as we know it lives in an evil day.”

#### President Harry S. Truman

“There is nothing more urgent confronting the people of all nations than the banning of all nuclear weapons under a fool-proof system of international control.”

#### President Dwight D. Eisenhower

“Let no one think that the expenditure of vast sums for weapons and systems of defense can guarantee absolute safety for the cities and citizens of any nation. The awful arithmetic of the atomic bomb does not permit any such easy solution.”

#### President John F. Kennedy

“Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness. The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us. . . . The mere existence of modern weapons . . . is a source of horror and discord and distrust.”

#### President Lyndon B. Johnson

“. . . uneasy is the peace that wears a nuclear crown. And we cannot be satisfied with a situation in which the world is capable of extinction in a moment of error, or madness, or anger.”

#### President Richard M. Nixon

“Over 400 million people . . . would be killed in an all-out [nuclear] exchange.”

**President Gerald R. Ford**

“The world faces an unprecedented danger in the spread of nuclear weapons technology.”

**President James E. Carter**

“In an all-out nuclear war, more destructive power than in all of World War II would be unleashed every second during the long afternoon it would take for all the missiles and bombs to fall. A World War II every second—more people killed in the first few hours than in all the wars of history put together. The survivors, if any, would live in despair amid the poisoned ruins of a civilization that had committed suicide.”

**President Ronald W. Reagan**

“We seek the elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.”

**President George H. W. Bush**

“Schoolchildren once hid under their desks in drills to prepare for nuclear war. I saw the chance to rid our children’s dreams of the nuclear nightmare, and I did.”

**President Bill Clinton**

“. . . protecting the American people from the dangers of nuclear war . . . is well worth fighting for. And I assure you, the fight is far from over.”