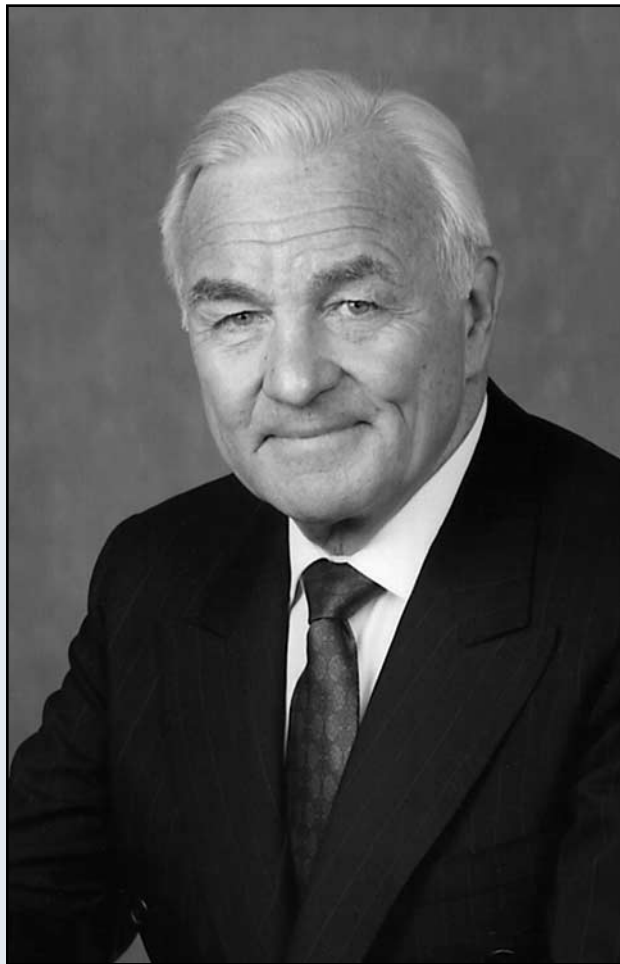


**ADM STANSFIELD TURNER**

graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946 and earned a master's degree from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. In 1967 he commissioned the guided missile cruiser USS *Horne* and the next year operated with the Seventh Fleet off Vietnam. On shore, he served in the Navy's Office of Politico-Military Affairs and as Executive Assistant and Naval Aide to the Secretaries of the Navy. After promotion to Rear Admiral in May 1970, he served as a flag officer in command of a carrier task group of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean; Director of the Navy's Office of Systems Analysis; Commander of the Second Fleet; and 36th President of the Naval War College. In September 1975, he was promoted to Admiral and became Commander-in-Chief of NATO's Southern Flank.



In February 1977 President Carter nominated ADM Turner to be Director of the CIA and presented him with the National Security Medal at the end of his tenure. In 1995 he was awarded a Senior Research Fellowship at the Norwegian Nobel Peace Institute in Oslo. He has taught at Yale University as well as the U.S. Military Academy and is on the faculty of the Graduate School of Public Affairs of the University of Maryland.

ADM Turner has written three books: *Secrecy and Democracy*, *Terrorism and Democracy*, and *Caging the Nuclear Genie—An American Challenge for Global Security*. In November 1998 he was awarded the Foreign Policy Association Medal for demonstrated commitment to peace and was selected as a Laureate of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Chase Investment Counsel Corporation and the American Association of Rhodes Scholars.

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ADM Turner spoke at the Millennial Challenges Colloquium series on 9 February 2001.  
The text of "The Dilemma of Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century" follows.





# The Dilemma of Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century

*ADM Stansfield Turner*

I would like to explore with you what I think is the most serious threat to national security, namely some 34,000 nuclear warheads in the world today. This may not be the most probable threat but could be the most dangerous, and is something to which we need to pay serious attention.

Today I am optimistic. I feel that this is the most propitious moment for controlling and limiting nuclear weapons in the last 50 years. First of all we have a president who has stated repeatedly that he wants to reduce the number of these weapons in our inventory, even unilaterally. We have a vice president who, in 1991 as secretary of defense, implemented a unilateral reduction in the readiness of tactical nuclear weapons, a reduction that was mirrored by the Soviets 9 days later. And we have a secretary of state who, in 1991, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs, tore up a nuclear contingency plan for the Gulf War.

Today we probably have more public awareness and concern for this problem than we have had in a long time. During the Cold War, the issue was massive nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Most of us as citizens could not imagine what that might be like. But now I think most of us can envision a terrorist or a rogue state setting off a nuclear weapon in the World Trade Center or elsewhere. Therefore we must do something, and the issue now is to define what that something should be.

And finally, I am optimistic because the Russian nuclear arsenal is inexorably declining. For the last 11 years, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, they simply have not been replacing their nuclear weapons on the schedule that is required to maintain them. Therefore, most people believe that by the end of this decade the Russians will have less than 1000 nuclear warheads capable of reaching the United States.

What, then, is the United States going to do? Are we going to maintain our current number of nuclear warheads? Are we going to find some way to go down in step with the Russians or to some particular number? What should that number be, and what steps should we take to get to that lower number?

## **WEAPONS REDUCTION**

There are several issues to the question of how far we should reduce our nuclear weapons. First, we simply cannot do it with more treaties. We have been negotiating and executing nuclear arms control treaties for over 30 years. On the one hand these treaties have been very successful. There have been reductions to the point where we have less than half of the nuclear warheads in the world that we once had. On the other hand, though, they have been spectacularly unsuccessful when the residual, after 30 years, is still 34,000 some

warheads in the world. That has not reduced the threat to humanity significantly. The treaty process is simply too timid and too slow.

For instance, we have been negotiating the START II Treaty now for 10 years. The Russian Duma has ratified it, but with provisos that the U.S. Senate will probably find unacceptable. So here we are, 10 years later, without anything in operation. Even worse, were the treaty to be put into effect tomorrow, it would be the end of 2007 before we would see the end result, and that result would not be the advertised 3500 warheads in each arsenal and that of the Russians. We would still have 10,000 nuclear warheads. The treaty does not cover warheads that are not actually mounted on inter-continental delivery vehicles. Nor does it even address the issue of shorter-range tactical nuclear weapons. And the United States has said quite openly that we intend to maintain 3500 mounted on-delivery vehicles, 3500 spares, and 3000 tacticals, for a total of 10,000.

This means not only maintaining, at some risk, more weaponry than we need, it also means abdicating leadership, particularly leadership against the proliferation of these weapons. How can we persuade the world that we are truly serious about preventing proliferation when we, the strongest military power on Earth, contend that 6 years from now we are still going to need 10,000 nuclear warheads while Saddam Hussein does not need even 1. I am not suggesting that we could persuade Saddam to desist based on anything we do, but we do need the cooperation of the Russians, the Chinese, the French, the Germans, and others whose arms sales have, in many cases, abetted the ambitions of people like Saddam Hussein.

Why have we insisted on proceeding only in the treaty process? We have done so because, from the beginning of the nuclear era, we have been fixated on the importance of having equal numbers of weapons with the Soviet Union or Russia. With conventional weaponry, numbers are important. Having more aircraft, more tanks, more ships can tip the balance. The measure, however, with nuclear weapons is, Can we accept the damage we are likely to receive in retaliation if we initiate the use of nuclear weapons? Killing our opponent two or three times over gives us very little satisfaction if we, in fact, end up dead.

So we have to ask, How much damage in retaliation would the U.S. public accept and feel we had still "won"? Could the president go to the American public one day and say, "I've just really achieved something important to us. I've completely destroyed and demobilized the nuclear threat from Russia. We no longer have to live under that shadow. And all I've lost is New York City." I don't think so. I believe the United States is deterred by the threat of even one nuclear detonation on our soil.

How about China and Russia? They have a different psychology, a different culture than we do. Maybe they would accept more. The threat of even modest numbers of detonations—not thousands or hundreds—will deter any nation from initiating nuclear war. And therefore, I do not think there is any question that we could safely go down to 1000 nuclear warheads—*total* nuclear warheads, i.e., tactical, spares, and operational warheads on missiles. We can do so even with greater assurance because we know the Russians are moving in that direction also.

The hitch is that we cannot just get to 1000 nuclear warheads by simply saying so, or by signing a treaty and promising to do so. We cannot get there urgently enough. It takes time to disassemble and defuse these weapons and get them off the line. We have only one place to do that, and its capacity is already being taxed. And I do not believe we will exercise the leadership that is needed to lead the world away from proliferation unless we move much more quickly than we can by demobilizing individual weapons.

## STRATEGIC ESCROW

I believe we must go to a process called "strategic escrow": The United States would unilaterally take 1000 warheads off of weapons and moves them at least 300 miles away so that there is an actual delay in our ability to reconstitute them. We would place them in storage, invite the Russians to put observers on the storage site, and let them count what goes in and if anything goes out. They would have no control over the situation, and there would be utterly no risk to us because if we should decide that we needed the warheads back, we could take them back. In my opinion, we would never do so. But this would be a major step in understanding that we only need very limited numbers of these weapons to deter nuclear war. After 4 or 5 years, if the Russians reciprocated, both of our nuclear arsenals could be down to about 1000 warheads total. The Russians would almost have to go along with this process. They do, after all, want to avoid the appearance of a wide gap in which we stay at 10,000 and they are forced down to 1000 or less.

So there is a great opportunity here for us to safely reduce numbers to, say, around 1000. Once we are there, all kinds of other opportunities develop. One is to bring in the other six nuclear powers and to arrange, in effect, an international condominium—eight nuclear powers, each with perhaps 200 warheads, all of them in escrow and none of them immediately ready to fire. What a wonderful and more safe position this would be for the world. Nobody is going to be ready to shoot. And if anybody does prepare to shoot, the world is going to know about it, and the mechanisms of diplomacy could get rolling.

This is not disarmament, which many people think is absolutely necessary. Theoretically it is, of course, the best solution. But I do not believe we should set a goal in 2001 of total nuclear disarmament. That may be an ultimate goal, but we have to have one that the American public can understand. And I do not believe that anyone thinks that it would be safe for the United States to get rid of all of its nuclear weapons tomorrow. There is no mechanism in sight that would control the possibility of cheating by a Saddam Hussein or the like.

Escrow opens the door to disarmament, but we must combine this with controls on fissile material and long-range missiles, and then progressively remove the components of the warheads that we have already taken into storage and move them to even more remote storage. We could make the process more and more complicated to reduce the possibility of reconstitution.

So we have a verifiable program in strategic escrow that can be initiated immediately, without all the delays of a treaty. We could put our observers in Russia and know exactly what they are doing, they could do likewise, and the result would be much greater stability.

## IMPEDIMENTS

There are, though, two clouds on the horizon. The first is the prospect of the United States building national missile defenses. The problem with that prospect is that even our allies strongly oppose it. They fear that if we are invulnerable, we will be less concerned about their continuing vulnerability. From their point of view, this is logical and self-serving, but from our point of view it does not make any sense at all. Just imagine the president of the United States telling the public that we can build an impermeable shield over the country but we are not going to do so because it would disturb the Europeans or other allies!

We have all read, of course, that the Russians and the Chinese are disturbed about the prospects of national missile defense as well. They also fear that it would make us invulnerable and would allow us to put leverage on them or even attack them and totally immobilize their nuclear forces. They want us to remain vulnerable if they are going to be vulnerable. This is specious reasoning. It is ridiculous to think that the United States would be able to find some combination of offense and defense that would give us 100% assurance against any retaliation, against 1 or 3 or 5 or 10 warheads coming at us in retaliation for our starting a nuclear war.

I also do not believe any combination of offense and defense exists that would lead a president to think that he or she should launch literally thousands of nuclear warheads at Russia in an attempt to destroy its entire nuclear capability. The consequences are both too uncertain and too inhumane to consider, and the president

would not be willing to accept that responsibility. So no matter what kind of defenses we build, we will always feel sufficiently vulnerable to be deterred from initiating the use of nuclear weapons. We could conceivably build enough of a defense to reduce the magnitude of our vulnerability, but not to eliminate it.

Still another argument against national missile defense raised recently by the president of France is that national missile defense will start a race—a stampede—toward more nuclear capability in other countries. We have to think that argument through. Russia cannot race to great heights of nuclear capability. It simply does not have the wherewithal. And even if they did, would it deter us any more if they had twice as many weapons? No. We would still be vulnerable. China is a bit of a different case. But put into perspective, the Chinese for many years now have appreciated that they deter us with very low numbers of weapons. They have only 20 some warheads that can strike the United States, and they have been content to stay at that level. If we built what the Chinese felt was a pretty good defense, maybe they would double or treble their numbers. But a huge race would not occur if they stick to their basic philosophy and understanding of the fact that deterrence takes place at rather low numbers.

Then there is the argument that if the Chinese build more weapons, the Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Koreans, who are all vulnerable to hundreds of Chinese warheads, may do likewise. The Chinese, in my opinion, would not drive those countries to the extreme of starting a nuclear program with all that entails. I do not even believe it would affect India, which is also vulnerable to hundreds of Chinese nuclear warheads.

What we need today is to lance this boil quickly, to simply declare that the ABM treaty is dead, and that we are going to build whatever defenses we feel necessary with whatever technologies we feel necessary. What I do not believe we should do is stampede. It does not appear that we have anything like a capability for building a missile defense today. We, as citizens, should insist that there be a rigorous program of testing, that it be open enough so that we all understand what is going on, and that at some point we be given the best estimate of the technical capabilities that we can build and the best estimate of their cost. Then we as citizens can decide if national missile defense is in our best interest. But we do not need to kowtow to the opinions of our allies or our rivals.

The other black cloud on the horizon is the doctrine that we have had since the early 1960s, i.e., that we would be the first to use nuclear weapons under certain circumstances. This doctrine is based on the promise we made to certain of our European allies that we would come to their aid with our nuclear arsenal if they were being overwhelmed in a conventional war with

the Warsaw Pact. I do not think that this was a politically acceptable doctrine back then or now. Nor do I think that it is a politically acceptable doctrine to talk about using nuclear weapons against a biological or chemical attack, against a horde of Chinese crossing the Korean border, against masses of Chinese junks going across the Taiwan Strait, or whatever else it may be. As long as we require the U.S. military to be ready to go first with these weapons in response to a non-nuclear provocation, we will not get agreement to reduce our warheads down to numbers like 200. There will be too many possible contingencies.

## CONCLUSION

We must put the possibilities into perspective. Of course, nuclear weapons would be more effective than conventional weapons. But you never go to war without having a political objective. In this case I believe that that objective will overrule military efficaciousness. The first use of nuclear weapons will not be acceptable politically because it will be seen as disproportionate to the provocation and because the risks and uncertainty involved in opening up this Pandora's box will be too great. But beyond that I believe, or perhaps hope, that advances in the lethality of weaponry today will make us look at conventional weaponry, presumably remotely guided munitions, as an alternative in these cases of non-nuclear provocation.

To conclude then, the moment is propitious overall for controlling and limiting nuclear weapons. But we must stop treating them as though they were just larger conventional weapons, where comparative numbers count or where, if we do more damage to the enemy than he does to us, we generally win. We need to start understanding and treating nuclear weapons as an unfortunate necessity, but an unusable component. They are unusable against a nuclear power because the risks of retaliation are too great. They are unusable against a non-nuclear power because there is just too much risk of uncertainty and risk of being disproportionate. And that uncertainty includes the fact that if we begin to live in a world in which there is occasional use of nuclear weapons, even in small numbers and even not against the United States, the world will be a very different place. The complexion of all relationships will change, and that change will not be a desirable one.

The fact that we have had 55 years of no use of these weapons demonstrates that they basically are unusable. Let us remember that it was the threat of massive destruction that was the primary deterrent factor over those years. Today that is not the case. We need to better understand the dynamics of these weapons, that they have a great military capability but also a very great political liability. We need to adapt our policies, our plans for the numbers we need, and our plans for how we get to those numbers based on the fact that they are unusable.