

## Viewpoints

### NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND NONPROLIFERATION

**Christopher Ford, Thomas Graham**

**FROM:** Christopher Ford

**TO:** Thomas Graham

**SUBJECT:** *Is Nuclear Disarmament Appropriate in Today's World?*

Dear Tom,

It is a pleasure to have the chance to correspond with you, and I am grateful to the *Security Index* for putting U.S. in touch for this exchange. I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts on whether a policy of nuclear disarmament is appropriate within the current international security climate.

For my part, I am somewhat skeptical. In my experience, proponents of nuclear disarmament, when pressed on the question, commonly declare that what is really needed to achieve and sustain a world of *zero* is some kind of fundamental transformation in how the international community thinks about military security. In this respect, I quite agree with the disarmament community, insofar as I believe it is true that envisioning a disarmed world necessarily presupposes a world that operates fundamentally differently – in its approaches to security, conflict resolution, status, and indeed national power itself – from how things work today.

Without some kind of politico-moral, or even psychological, revolution in world politics, in fact, my suspicion is that disarmament would create more problems than it would solve. To my eye, without such a transformation, a world with no existing nuclear weapons but living with the ever-present possibility of their re-development by any one or more of a large number of states seems likely to be a less stable and more perilous place than a world like the one we live in today. As Thomas Schelling has rightly observed, in such a disarmed but nuclear-capable world, every crisis would be a potential nuclear crisis. Indeed, incentives might even exist for a state in a crisis to race to build a handful of nuclear weapons and actually use them preemptively, to win an overwhelming victory and preclude its rival's weaponization. (Nor is it obvious that a disarmed world would not see the door opened, once again, to general war between the major powers. As I have said elsewhere, 1914 or 1941 would represent no improvement over 2012.)

By contrast to that potentially perilous future environment, today's world – in which a small number of states retain nuclear weapons but avoid Cold War-style arms races with each other, and in which non-proliferation norms make it hard for additional players to join the *game* – does not seem so bad. It may not be easy to ensure such conditions in the future, of course, but doing so sounds more feasible than achieving *zero*.

My disagreement with the disarmament community is really about how feasible it is to achieve the kind of global transformation that would be needed to make *zero*

anything but destabilizing madness, and how likely it is that such a thing will occur. Such transformation is not beyond imagining, I suppose, but that sort of epochal psychosocial evolution is probably not the kind of thing that one can count on, predict a date for, or offer much of a coherent public policy *roadmap* for achieving. (Indeed, because of the potentially horrendous costs of disarming in a world that is otherwise still armed, it is very hard to imagine how one could persuade any rational actor to lead the way.) Even the famously disarmament-friendly President Obama has said that we should not expect disarmament in his lifetime, and I'd reckon that if we will ever see it at all, he is greatly understating the time that will be required.

If *zero* is in fact much less likely and much more distant an objective than disarmers claim, however, we will have a lot of work still to do for many decades in maintaining security and stability through robust deterrent policies. Since even the most optimistic of disarmers do not expect abolition to occur soon, I thus hope that we will be able to agree – at least in the short term – upon a number of issues that are important to maintaining deterrence and security until such time as some such hoped-for transformation occurs.

I may myself be too optimistic in this, but I believe it is possible to imagine something of an American consensus upon nuclear policy issues in the short and medium term, with hawks and disarmers *agreeing to disagree* about the long-term future while yet working together on matters such as: U.S. nuclear modernization; warhead safety, security, and reliability; command and control survivability; achieving optimal tailoring of nuclear forces to anticipated missions so as to be able to reduce to the lowest possible number; and robust and effective measures to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weaponry and mitigate the damage caused by non-proliferation failures.

Such is my *two cents' worth*, at any rate. How do you see this question?

All my best,  
Chris

**FROM:** Thomas Graham  
**TO:** Christopher Ford  
**SUBJECT:** *RE: Is Nuclear Disarmament Appropriate in Today's World?*

Dear Chris,

It is equally my pleasure to correspond with you about these issues and I also thank *Polemics* and the *Security Index* for making these arrangements. These are important issues and they deserve serious attention on a regular basis. Overall, Chris, my response to your *two cents* as to whether a policy of nuclear disarmament is appropriate in the current situation is to say that we do not differ greatly. Our principal differences it seems to me are how stable do we see present conditions to be and on my part perhaps a greater emphasis on non-proliferation than deterrence.

Since 2006 I have been working with the so-called *Group of Four*: former Secretary of State George Shultz, former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry, former Secretary of

State Henry Kissinger and former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sam Nunn on the subject of nuclear disarmament. I very much agree with their assessment articulated in their first Wall Street Journal op-ed article in January, 2007 that “...unless urgent new actions are taken, the U.S. soon will be compelled to enter a new nuclear era that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically even more costly than was Cold War deterrence.” It is not clear to me that the stability of U.S.-Soviet Cold War deterrence can be replicated for the next fifty years, with the spread of technology, nuclear weapon arsenals outside of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, programs such as those of North Korea and Iran and the lessening viability of the NPT as compared with past decades. Thus, while the conditions of the current international security situation would certainly not permit a serious effort to eliminate nuclear weapons in the near future – among other things highly intrusive world-wide verification and rigorous means of enforcement (including military measures) systems would be required – not possible in today's world – as the Four Statesmen indicated in their article, urgent steps should be taken to lay the groundwork for the achievement of the conditions that would permit the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Every American president since WWII has in principle favored the elimination of nuclear weapons and every one since Richard Nixon has reaffirmed the obligations of the NPT which envisions the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. Both candidates in the 2008 presidential campaign supported the vision of the Four Statesmen, and President Obama in his Prague speech articulated this further. But having said this, it is worthy of note that as the Four Statesmen indicated in their article no president was more explicit on this than was Ronald 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."

Thus, nuclear disarmament as a goal is one that it is imperative to retain. However, we do not live in a world where this is possible or even foreseeable. We live in a world of threats, where it is not clear that the NPT will hold, and that nuclear weapons will not spread significantly further-referred to by president John F. Kennedy as "the greatest possible danger and hazard."

Thus I agree, Chris, everything possible must be done to prevent further nuclear weapon proliferation and as the Four Statesmen argue everything possible must also be done, in my view, to create the conditions that will make the eventual abolishment of nuclear weapons possible. New START was a good step in that it essentially codifies where the U.S. and Russia planned to be anyway. But much more should be done in the nearer future to include: reducing the alert status of nuclear weapons; pursuing further reductions in nuclear weapons – not only U.S. and Russian weapons but also those of other states possessing nuclear weapons; finding a way to permit U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and its entry into force; achieving the highest standard of security for nuclear weapons and material world-wide; eliminating forward deployed tactical nuclear weapons; and ending the production of fissile material for weapons globally. Also, hand in hand with all this must be efforts to regulate conventional weapons and to solve regional confrontations.

And I also agree that at this time nuclear deterrence has a role to dissuade the use of nuclear weapons by others and for this purpose the U.S. stockpile must be maintained safe and reliable. But this should be able to be accomplished at a far lower level than Cold War deterrence and indeed below New START levels.

So those are my thoughts and again I am grateful for the opportunity to have this discussion.

All my best,  
Tom

**FROM:** Christopher Ford  
**TO:** Thomas Graham  
**SUBJECT:** *The U.S. Nuclear Arsenal*

Dear Tom,

Thanks for your thoughtful reply. I don't think we disagree in principle about the desirability of creating conditions that might someday make disarmament attractive and feasible, but we might part company about how to do that, and how to prioritize objectives along the way.

For now, however, let me ask you a second question. One often hears it said that if the United States pursues nuclear disarmament, then its allies may feel the need to develop their own nuclear weapons. What are your thoughts on this?

For my part, it seems to me that some U.S. allies might conceivably feel the need to develop nuclear weaponry even if the United States does maintain a robust and credible nuclear arsenal. The U.S. security *umbrella* for such allies has never been exclusively nuclear, but has instead relied in part upon a very strong American conventional power-projection capability as well – backed up by the availability of nuclear weapons in extremis. (To see why this is so, imagine how credible it would seem for a U.S. president to try to defend a small regional ally against conventional attack by a nuclear weapon state only by threatening World War III in response to the first local artillery bombardment!) The umbrella has always relied upon the availability of both nuclear and capable conventional forces. I think we'd be making a great mistake to forget this.

U.S. nuclear disarmament would surely make these proliferation pressures all the worse, particularly in an era when American leaders seem likely to reduce defense spending drastically, thus significantly cutting back the global conventional power-projection capabilities that we will have available in years ahead. From the point of view of some U.S. regional allies – who face additional proliferation pressures on account of the international community's failure to prevent proliferation in North Korea and to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions, and who (in East Asia) now also worry about China's growing military power and regional bellicosity – this is a grim combination.

If the United States wishes to have any chance of providing security assurances to its regional allies of a sort that would reduce the proliferation pressures they are coming

to face – and especially if we wish to do this while reducing our nuclear arsenal – we will need to maintain a conventional capability beyond what Washington currently seems willing to pay for. Providing regional stability and forestalling further nuclear weapons proliferation through a robust U.S. military posture is neither easy nor inexpensive, but it is very important to international peace and security. The current approach of seeking further nuclear reductions, reducing defense spending across the board, and seeking to reassure friends of the continued and unshakeable credibility of our alliance commitments seems dangerous indeed: these three objectives seem fundamentally incompatible. President Obama sometimes likes to depict what look like difficult quandaries as really being *false choices*, but we don't face a false choice here: it's a real one. If we're going to cut our mainline defense budget, it will be harder to reduce our nuclear holdings, and vice-versa. I fear we're headed for the worst possible alternative – namely, cutting both, in which case it would be hard to blame some of our allies for finding nuclear weaponry increasingly attractive.

And since this brings U.S. to the topic of possible U.S. nuclear weapons reductions, let me also ask you how low you think we can go. Opponents of U.S. nuclear disarmament believe the United States needs a nuclear arsenal to protect itself and its allies. But how many weapons are enough, and what sorts of weapons should we have?

I do not myself think that it is necessary to expand the current U.S. nuclear capability. Modernization, however, is essential, as is maintaining a nuclear weapons infrastructure capable of rapid and effective expansion if the future security environment should take a dramatic turn for the worse.

For many years the United States was the only nuclear weapons possessor that was not modernizing its arsenal, and now that we have just begun the long process of doing so, it is very important that we continue. For so long as we retain any nuclear weapons, I believe it is vital – and both deterrence and crisis stability require – that they be safe, secure, reliable, credible, survivable, and as well-tailored to their potential missions as possible. We will also need to ensure that our nuclear weapons infrastructure is capable of being genuinely *responsive* to future threats, not least because keeping state-of-the-art weapon design capabilities and a robust production capacity is a critical *hedge* against future uncertainty without which we would likely need to keep in existence a much larger nuclear arsenal.

These requirements do not lessen with reductions in our nuclear arsenal, and they may even increase. The fewer weapons we possess, it seems to me, the more important it is that those we keep are optimized for modern needs in all these respects, and the more important it is that we maintain the ability to reverse course in the face of some grave new threat. Underinvestment in modernization has left U.S. with an arsenal built around systems developed in and optimized for a Cold War competition that ended decades ago, not now changed in any significant essential but merely reduced drastically in numbers. (It has also left U.S. with an infrastructure that is today all but incapable of genuinely new work in this field or of significant production volumes, either now or in some future contingency.) If we are serious about maintaining deterrence and meeting our security needs as the 21st century progresses, especially with fewer weapons on hand than at present, we have a lot of work to do.

As for how many weapons we need today, I find that a very challenging question. Clearly, if we wish to keep reducing the size of our arsenal we will at some point encounter a choice between continuing with *counterforce* targeting (i.e., aiming for military targets) and adopting a more weapon-economical *countervalue* approach that deliberately aims at innocent civilian populations. (There is not invariably much practical distinction between these two positions, of course, for with our current weapon designs, attacks on military targets that happen to be in or near urban areas would probably have many of the same effects as countervalue targeting of those same population centers. Nevertheless, it is a significant moral distinction, and perhaps a legal one as well.) Depending upon who and what we wish to deter, moreover, the choice between counterforce and countervalue could affect how effective our deterrent posture is over time as well. It could also affect the utility of the *nuclear umbrella* we extend to allies. (The credibility of countervalue threats in response to all but the most egregious direct attacks on one's homeland has frequently been questioned, especially where the potential adversary is a nuclear-armed state.)

Most fundamentally, perhaps, the answer of "how low can we go" in our nuclear numbers will depend upon how many targets we feel it necessary to hold at risk – and under what conditions – and there is little likelihood of that debate occurring in public. Moreover, since force structure planning needs to be done many years in advance, we need to make such calculations not just on the basis of the current security environment but on the basis of what we think the future environment might look like. This is necessarily a very inexact business, and there exist powerful incentives to *aim high* as a hedge against future uncertainty. (Personally, I would rather have more weapons than I need to deter my adversaries than have too few, and I suspect most U.S. planners would share this perspective.) Particularly as some other nuclear weapons possessors continue to build up their numbers – and here it must be acknowledged that uncertainty over the future of the notoriously opaque Chinese arsenal is perhaps the foremost problem, though not the only one – it will likely be very difficult for U.S. to contemplate further reductions, particularly before a vigorous U.S. modernization program has come to fruition.

That's plenty from me for now. What are your thoughts on these matters?

All my best,  
Chris

**FROM:** Thomas Graham  
**TO:** Christopher Ford  
**SUBJECT:** *RE: The U.S. Nuclear Arsenal*

Dear Chris,

This is a *tour de force*. I would need a short book to answer adequately the important questions that you raise, but I will try a few comments.

First a few words about the nuclear umbrella. This was always a Cold War concept but it does have some relevance today. But in my view it was always a bit overrated. What caused, and is still causing, to the degree it continues in this post-Cold War era, America's allies to rely on her has always been far more complicated than nuclear

weapons or even military strength generally. America's principal Cold War allies, the UK and France opted for nuclear weapons. President De Gaulle famously said, paraphrasing, "will the United States risk New York to save Paris?" He apparently didn't think so and built the Force de Frappe. Germany early on was constrained by Treaty from building nuclear weapons, a post-WWII measure. Did Israel rely on the nuclear weapons of America for protection? No, it built its own highly sophisticated nuclear weapon arsenal. Japan was prevented from building nuclear weapons by its post-WW II constitution, and South Korea remained in the non-nuclear weapon state camp only after very heavy pressure from the United States in the late 1970s. Some argue that an Iranian nuclear weapon arsenal can be countered as far as Saudi Arabia is concerned by extending to it the U.S. nuclear umbrella, but if De Gaulle did not believe that the United States would risk New York to save Paris why would Saudi Arabia believe that the U.S. would risk New York to save Riyadh? The response by Saudi Arabia to a nuclear weapon stockpile in Iran would be proliferation, that is nuclear weapons, as did France and Israel, likely promptly acquired from Islamabad. Thus, the nuclear umbrella while real has also been limited in its effect.

Robert McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense, used to tell me that neither president for whom he worked (Kennedy and Johnson) would ever have contemplated the use of nuclear weapons except in response to nuclear weapons being used against the United States. Undoubtedly presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan and the first president Bush shared this view. There is some uncertainty with respect to president Nixon in that he did raise the U.S. to an alert level of Def Con 2 during the Middle East crisis of 1973 to intimidate the Soviets but likely he shared this view as well. And this is certainly true of the post-Cold War presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama. So in a sense it is a false choice, nuclear weapons cannot replace conventional weapons because they simply will not be used to defend a regional ally except in the case of actual nuclear attack. Thus our defensive umbrella everywhere will remain conventional, small regional allies will have to be defended with conventional arms but likely not large armies any more as opposed to more mobile type units such as Navy Seals and Army Special Forces. NATO of course has its own arrangements. Thus the number of nuclear weapons that the U.S. needs for its defense is the number needed to deter other nuclear weapons. This is the only role today for nuclear weapons, the U.S. never has and will not introduce nuclear weapons into conventional conflicts. This is well understood, the nuclear weapon non-use norm is today widely supported, it obviously is important that it continue to hold.

So how much is enough – the old question from the Cold War? Absent further actions from states other than the U.S. and Russia the New Start levels are an appropriate level. The U.S. and Russia in a New START follow on negotiation could perhaps reduce to 1000 total weapons but in my view the U.S. and Russia should seek in this context a cap on the stockpiles of the other nuclear weapon states. And then perhaps if that should be accomplished there could follow at some point, hopefully not too far in the future, a multilateral nuclear weapon negotiation to reduce nuclear weapons. Should this take place, perhaps the number 300 would suffice for the U.S. and Russia on the condition that there would be significantly lower limits on the other states possessing nuclear weapons. Thus with these caveats perhaps 300 nuclear weapons would be sufficient for the U.S. to effectively deter the remaining stockpiles.

And in contemplating this process it is in my view, most unlikely that U.S. allies would seek nuclear weapon stockpiles. For one thing it would derail the nuclear weapon reduction process which virtually all of them support. Germany, Japan and South Korea have long been very strong supporters of nuclear disarmament and other U.S. allies, the UK, France and Israel already have nuclear weapons. Threats abound to the NPT, North Korea threatens Northeast Asia, particularly South Korea and Japan, and the Iranian program threatens the Middle East – such states as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. If new nuclear stockpiles are considered by U.S. allies it will be because of reasons such as this, not the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

However, with respect to the U.S. stockpile, whether it is at a level of 300, 1000, or at New START levels, modernization must be pursued vigorously as long as nuclear weapon testing, contrary to the moratorium, is not part of this. It is important to keep the existing U.S. stockpile safe, secure and reliable.

All my best,  
Tom

**FROM:** Christopher Ford  
**TO:** Thomas Graham  
**SUBJECT:** *My Differences with the Disarmament Community*

Dear Tom,

Thanks again for your response: I'm enjoying this exchange! I would agree that a fairly strong norm of nuclear weapons non-use has developed since 1945 – but there has also developed a pretty strong norm that major powers don't wage general war against each other. We should be cautious about disarmament in case the overlap between this second norm and the existence of nuclear weaponry is not just a coincidence.

But I hope you'll let me toss another question at you. In his Prague speech in April 2009, President Obama said that nuclear disarmament is unlikely to be achieved in his lifetime. As I suggested in an earlier e-mail, I agree with that – and indeed think Obama understates the time that will be needed for the abolition, if indeed such a future is ever likely to materialize at all. I was wondering, however, what timeline you yourself might project – and what, if anything, might persuade you to drop that objective?

For my part, I think trying to set a timetable for *zero* would be both pointless and inadvisable. Rather than a catalyst for constructive action, a timeline would probably just be an exercise in humiliation. Worse still, an imminent *failure* to make the deadline might prompt the stupidity of political desperation. (As a friend of mine likes to put it, “if you want it bad, you get it bad!”)

Let me repeat, however, that despite my skepticism about abolition, I still see room for cooperation between hawks and disarmers on nuclear deterrent stability during the likely rather long period before any such *zero* is likely to appear at all feasible. As I mentioned in my first e-mail, I hope there is room for agreement on modernization and robust deterrence for so long as we retain any such weapons at all.

As for what we can do to increase the odds that something akin to *zero* will occur at some point in the future, my instinct is that present-day disarmament debates focus upon the wrong target. Trying to address issues of the existence (or non-existence) of nuclear weapons themselves may not actually be as important as trying to address at least some of the rivalries and competitive dynamics of global politics that have helped make the acquisition or retention of nuclear weapons seem so appealing to a number of states. I don't mean to suggest that we can plan our way to a wholesale transformation of world politics, of course, but it may well be possible to make some progress on political issues that will help ease – if perhaps still not *solving* – a number of states' security dilemmas.

Focusing upon the tools used in a rivalry, in other words, may be less important than trying to defuse the intensity or scope of that rivalry itself – which is more a broader question of international politics than an arms control objective per se.

The history of our extraordinary progress reducing the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals since 1991, it seems to me, underscores this point. Arms control measures played some role in containing or channeling the U.S.-Soviet arms race during the tensions of the Cold War, but sweeping arms reductions were possible only as a result of the underlying rivalry having undergone fundamental change with the end of Cold War itself. (Arms control, one might say, is about managing what you can't fix, disarmament is what you can achieve once things are fixed, and statesmanship is about trying to fix them.) Between Washington and Moscow, the political changes that ended the Cold War made the critical difference, and arms reduction progress was comparatively easy thereafter. Today we have taken out of service something like four out of every five weapons we had in 1991, and we are no more insecure for it. That's progress indeed!

But this is something that I think the contemporary disarmament community has gotten entirely wrong: focusing so much upon the nuclear weapons themselves puts the cart before the horse. Even from the perspective of seeking some eventual *zero*, we should worry less at this point about reducing the number of nuclear arms and more about how to ease tensions and resolve political problems. If we can't make progress on those political issues, we might as well openly give up on *zero*, because it won't happen anyway. (Diplomatic energy and political capital are finite resources; we should spend them on things that aren't fantasies.)

But that raises another question I'd like to ask you. What, in your view, would happen were the United States actually to repudiate the goal of disarmament? It is often alleged in disarmament circles that such a rejection would immediately cause global non-proliferation norms to break down, but I'm not so sure.

Frankly, I don't believe that the success or failure of global non-proliferation depends nearly so much upon U.S. disarmament policy as pro-disarmament Americans often like to flatter themselves by thinking. (Perhaps you recall that saying about how for someone who only knows how to use a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail?) At any rate, I think the linkage is pretty tenuous, if indeed there exists any at all.

From a non-proliferation perspective, we've certainly gotten precious little out of our ostentatious pro-disarmament posturing during the last four years. (Iran and North Korea face tougher sanctions than they did before, but these pressures haven't been enough to change their policies, and in any event we owe what sanctions there are to those regimes' ongoing provocations – not to Barack Obama's disarmament promises. Nor is our current disarmament-friendly position preventing an ever-larger number of countries from pursuing technological capabilities clearly intended to give them a nuclear weapons *option* in the future.) The world's proliferation dynamics, alas, continue apace, essentially unaffected by our disarmament-friendly positioning. We might see some repercussions in diplomatic circles if we renounced the eventual objective of disarmament, therefore – for cherished dreams die hard whether or not they are realistic ones – but it's not obvious that anything really substantive would actually change.

I should stress, however, that I don't think it is necessary to repudiate the idea of disarmament. In the essentially hortatory way it is addressed in the Preamble and Article VI of the Non-proliferation Treaty – that is, as an aspiration for the world's eventual progress, a destination that we would like someday to achieve through the easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between States – it is quite unobjectionable. (Indeed, as you have pointed out, this notion has been endorsed by every U.S. president since 1968.)

I have no problem with the objective as thus understood. I do, however, think we need to be more honest about several things: (a) the difficulty and distantness of *zero* if indeed it ever arrives at all; (b) the need to avoid doing stupid things in our security policy during such time as nuclear weapons continue to exist; and (c) the fact that it is probably more important today to work on easing tensions and strengthening trust than on the Sisyphean labor of trying to bring about significant and lasting reductions without having first made such political progress.

Have I provoked you enough yet? I'd be interested in your reactions ....

All my best,  
Chris

**FROM:** Thomas Graham  
**TO:** Christopher Ford  
**SUBJECT:** *RE: My Differences with the Disarmament Community*

Dear Chris,

Setting a time line to achieve zero nuclear weapons certainly would be pointless and unwise. I spent a significant part of my active government career opposing the Indian concept of *time bound* disarmament and I have always opposed the Nuclear Weapon Convention, espoused by some activists and many countries in the Non Aligned Movement (in case you missed it the last two chairmen were Cuba and Egypt, the new chairman is Iran, but the Movement has membership of over 100 countries). I had to contend with them in the 1994-1995 effort to make the NPT permanent, it is possible to do so but it is important to listen to them and their concerns-but that is diplomacy.

Of course there is a considerable difference between some of the countries in the Movement and the vast majority as to the potential for productive dialogue. But placing a time limit on the achievement on nuclear disarmament is significantly misguided without doubt.

That said I consider a commitment to nuclear disarmament as a real objective – far off indeed but real – and indeed imperative. The NPT was and remains a strategic bargain – not a gift from the 180 plus non-nuclear weapon states to the recognized five nuclear weapon states. That bargain was and is non-proliferation for most of the world, in exchange for peaceful nuclear cooperation and nuclear disarmament efforts aimed at the ultimate abolition of nuclear stockpiles by the five nuclear weapon states: US, UK, France, Russia and China. No matter the text of NPT Article VI, this expectation is abundantly clear from the record, in 1965, for example, the Swedish-Indian resolution made clear that the non-proliferation treaty being contemplated must be based on *balanced obligations* for nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states alike. The good faith honoring of this strategic bargain creates balance for the NPT and political cover for many countries to give up forever the most powerful weapons ever created – the possession of which for many years has symbolized first class status in the world. The non-nuclear weapon states understood that the *ultimate* abolition of nuclear stockpiles remains far off, but at least said the non-nuclear weapon states in 1968 and ever since, the states possessing nuclear weapons could stop testing them. Thus the CTBT became the litmus test of nuclear weapon state good faith in observing the NPT strategic bargain. Failure thus far to bring the CTBT into force; the Indian, Pakistani, the Israeli as well as the North Korean and Iranian programs; nuclear weapon state-principally the United States and China-non observance of the NPT agreements reached in 1995 and 2000; among other things, have all seriously weakened the NPT. It is important to remember the comment by Ambassador Dhanapala, the president of the 1995 Conference, at the conclusion of the Conference, “the NPT does not run on autopilot.” Thus in this situation, in my view, if the United States – not having ratified the CTBT – also were to reject nuclear disarmament, that would be the end of the NPT and it would gradually fade away.

The second reason that I support nuclear disarmament as a real objective is that I agree with Messrs. Shultz, Perry, Kissinger and Nunn about the dangers of the current situation as I said in a previous message. I believe that it is important to “rekindle the vision” of Ronald Reagan of the elimination of nuclear weapons. And his vision should be reasserted with “practical measures toward achieving that goal” pursued on an urgent basis. Through such a process hopefully one day, by means of activities in many areas to include nuclear weapon policy, conventional arms, and regional confrontations, the conditions will be created which will make the elimination of nuclear weapons conceivable. But as to when this might be it is difficult to say. The time is certainly far off. The world must fundamentally change to, among other things, permit comprehensive worldwide verification which must include intrusive onsite inspection everywhere and a truly effective means of enforcement by the world community which includes economic and where necessary military measures. This is a tall order but one worth pursuing through interim measures now such as CTBT and a fissile material for weapons cut off treaty but never losing sight of the vision. And as I agreed yesterday during this long period ahead appropriate measures must ensure that the remaining U.S. stockpile remains safe, secure and reliable.

Finally, nuclear disarmament does not have a great deal to do with President Obama. He largely took his lead on this subject from the Shultz Group. The real impetus came from and comes from president Ronald Reagan. But even so the US, along with China, remained the least disarmament friendly of the major states, for example, Russia, the UK, France, Germany and Japan have all ratified CTBT, the U.S. has not. Russia has more nuclear weapons but the U.S. spends more money on its nuclear weapon complex. Of course Russia and the U.S. possess over 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, thus Russia remains, as all through them Cold War the indispensable partner for the U.S. in all non-proliferation and nuclear weapon reduction and disarmament efforts. Indeed US-Russian cooperation is essential to the continued viability of the NPT.

All my best,  
Tom

**FROM:** Christopher Ford  
**TO:** Thomas Graham  
**SUBJECT:** *U.S. Politics and Russia's Nonproliferation Policy*

Dear Tom,

You're quite right, as Ambassador Dhanapala put it, that the NPT does not run on autopilot – though in truth, I've never heard anyone suggest that it does. It's clear that making the non-proliferation regime work takes effort and commitment. It's shameful, therefore, that so few countries apart from the United States and its allies have shown much willingness to shoulder burdens or to bear risks in support of non-proliferation.

The modern upwelling of international diplomatic unhappiness with the NPT and ill-disguised sympathy for proliferators has precisely coincided with massive post-Cold War nuclear reductions by the United States and Russia, giving the lie to any suggestion that disarmament breeds non-proliferation success. One often hears it promised that our disarming faster will turn this around, but experience suggests quite the opposite: the trend since the early 1990s has been that disarmament progress by the superpowers is answered by non-proliferation backsliding. Needless to say, I find this worrying, and get exasperated to be told that the answer to the world's non-proliferation problems is for U.S. to do disarm ourselves faster.

But let's move to a slightly different question. As I write this, the Republican National Convention is about to get underway in Florida and we are thus about to enter the final stretch of the 2012 presidential election campaign. Naturally, one wonders about what U.S. presidential politics – and the possibility of having a new occupant in the White House – will mean for arms control and disarmament. How do you think the election will shape these issues?

Though I do not know exactly what Governor Romney thinks on these issues, I would myself imagine that a Romney Administration would have perspectives much closer to what I have outlined in this exchange with you than to the positions of the Obama Administration. I assume that a Romney Administration would attempt to press more

vigorously for U.S. nuclear modernization and infrastructure responsiveness, would be less sympathetic to the prospect of further reductions, and would much more strongly resist limitations upon U.S. missile defenses. It might, however, still be interested in further strategic arms control negotiation – though perhaps more eagerly with China on transparency and/or confidence-building measures than with Russia on weapon numbers or weapon types.

If it did choose to engage in further strategic negotiations, however, it might be that a Romney Administration would stand a better chance than Obama of eliciting meaningful concessions from the other side. It would probably be clear that Romney would not consider it absolutely essential to have any agreement, and that he would feel freer than Obama simply to walk away from the table if offered inadequate terms. (By contrast, the Obama Administration's negotiating effectiveness has surely been hampered by the widespread, and probably accurate, perception that it was critical to Obama's agenda that some deal be reached, and that he be able to point to something that could be described as *progress* towards the goal of *zero*. As a general rule, I think, the needy negotiate poorly.)

As for Obama's own policy, it is an open question precisely what his approach would be if he were re-elected. Some observers feel that if returned to the White House, President Obama – who would at that point be unconstrained by any further direct accountability to the American voter – would plunge headlong into the disarmament enthusiasms that he has talked about for years but has so far not chosen, or had the opportunity, to make into U.S. policy. (Obama's unintentionally-publicized reassurance to then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that the White House would have “more flexibility” after the 2012 election to accommodate Russian demands on missile defense is “Exhibit A” for this line of argument.) Hawks tend to fear this, while disarmers seem to place much hope in it. My guess is that a re-elected Obama would still face considerable political and institutional constraints, however, even if he did want to move much further down the disarmament road.

If Obama were re-elected, I would expect that the most significant steps he would take toward disarmament – if any – are more likely to be unilateral ones than negotiated ones. Republicans in Congress might yet do much to stymie such U.S. unilateralism, but the White House could surely do something significant, for good or for ill, if it wanted to.

The irony is that, as the Congressionally-appointed Strategic Posture Review Commission demonstrated in 2009, bipartisan agreement actually exists in the U.S. policy community on most aspects of U.S. strategic policy: a consensus on cautious policies of modernization, *hedging*, a strong deterrent but a reduced role for nuclear weapons, and openness to disarmament if and when suitable conditions present themselves. This is a domestic political consensus, however, that Obama could destroy by unilateralist enthusiasms, thus perhaps poisoning the prospects for sensible policymaking (not to mention negotiated, ratified arms control) for many years. But he may not care: the most fervent disarmers approach the subject more as theology than reasoned policy. We shall see.

But before we leave the subject of non-proliferation entirely, Tom, let me ask you – for the benefit of *Security Index* readers – what you think about Russia's current role

in the non-proliferation regime, and how you think Americans see Russia today. To what extent is Moscow perceived as a threat? As a reliable partner?

I hope I don't offend readers, but to me – to put it charitably – Moscow's role in global nuclear non-proliferation policy has been disappointing. With Russia having actually built for Iran the nuclear reactor at Bushehr, Russian entities reportedly having played a role in designing the plutonium-production reactor Iran has under construction at Arak, and Moscow having long joined China in diplomatic foot-dragging at the UN Security Council over non-proliferation sanctions against both Iran and North Korea, the Russians are doing both far less than they could and far less than they should. It is hard to imagine that Russia actually supports such proliferation, but Putin-era Moscow certainly seems to place little priority upon non-proliferation. (At some level, in fact, today's Russian leaders may not much mind the degree to which nuclear developments in Iran, for instance, complicate U.S. grand strategy and push up the global oil prices upon which Russia's petroleum economy depends, and upon which may hinge the survival of the *siloviki* elite in Russia's corrupt and ever more baldly autocratic *managed democracy*.)

Washington thus has little reason to regard Russia as a reliable partner in non-proliferation, or – to be honest – in much else these days. If anything, Putin's Russia seems increasingly intent upon recreating for itself a strutting imperial aesthetic vaguely reminiscent of the Soviet era, or perhaps of imperial times.

Thankfully, there seems little chance of any revival of the kind of really deep tensions and conflicts that characterized the Cold War, and I see little danger of a full-blown arms race no matter how many times the Russian president appears before the cameras to boast about a new warhead or missile. (To most Americans today, I suspect, Russia still seems more annoying than threatening. This is not a relationship poised to spring into a revived Cold War-style rivalry.) Nevertheless, all these developments are unfortunate – for Russia's neighbors, for ordinary Russians, and for the international community.

In light of this, I'd love to sound you out about Russo-American strategic arms control too, but let's save that for the next round. For now, how do you assess Russia's role in non-proliferation?

All my best,  
Chris

**FROM:** Thomas Graham  
**TO:** Christopher Ford  
**SUBJECT:** *RE: U.S. Politics and Russia's Nonproliferation Policy*

Dear Chris,

First, let me address what Ambassador Dhanapala meant by “autopilot.” He set forth at some length that the NPT is a strategic bargain between the five recognized nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states-most of the world-now 180 plus states. The indefinite extension agreement of 1995 also was such a bargain, even more

explicitly with a list of actions that all states – including the five nuclear weapon states – agreed to undertake. The list includes a comprehensive test ban treaty, a fissile material cut off treaty, worldwide deep reductions in nuclear weapons, more nuclear weapon free zones, improved verification for the NPT, and so forth. It was his view – which I share – that progress on this agenda over time is essential to the viability and survival of the NPT over the longer term. Failure to make progress would be operating on “autopilot.” Some progress on this agenda has been made, but there still is no test ban in force, no progress on fissile material cut off, some reductions have been agreed, the Additional Protocol for the NPT has been negotiated and relatively widely accepted, and some progress has been made on Free Zones. But most of the world sees the United States and to a lesser extent China as the most significant obstacles to fulfillment of this agenda. And this is not insignificant because largely those are the states that we do not want to acquire nuclear weapons. The primary reason for this is the U.S. unwillingness to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, from the earliest of days seen by the non-weapon states as the litmus test of nuclear weapon state good faith in implementing the NPT basic bargain.

Turning to President Obama and nuclear disarmament, if re-elected he may try to seek Senate ratification to CTBT and likely will seek a second round of START reductions to bring in limits on Russian tactical weapons, widely supported in the US, although Russia is reluctant. What he will do on missile defense is difficult to say but he probably will try to work out something on missile defense with Russia. (In the interest of full disclosure I should describe my personal view on missile defense as it is relevant here. It was the first subject that I worked on when I came to ACDA in 1970. I have never had a fundamental objection to it but I have never had any faith that it would work sufficiently to give U.S. military commanders any confidence. Thus I have no objection to it unless it interferes with some other important security priority of the US.). Obama in my view had a successful nuclear policy in his first term with the New START Treaty and the Nuclear Security Summit process. Except for his speech in Prague all of this had little to do with disarmament. It is true that there is an ongoing Pentagon process aimed at determining what size and type of nuclear stockpile the U.S. should have going forward-looking at the subject from the military point of view. It is possible that this could lead to unilateral cuts, however from a personal point of view I would prefer that they held back to bargain for things the U.S. might want from the Russians. But we should remember that as far as U.S. unilateral cuts are concerned President George Bush did more than anyone else, reducing the U.S. stockpile by 50% from approximately 10,000 to 5,000. I didn't really like that so much either. As far as what Governor Romney might do in this field – it is impossible to know as he has no experience in the field.

And let me say, Chris, that in general I do share your enthusiasm for the report of the Strategic Posture Review Commission. I have read it carefully and believe it does represent a large measure of bi-partisan agreement on strategic policy. It is a fact that for the most part Republicans and Democrats, despite some disagreements, have been cooperating in this field for a very long time.

Lastly, let me turn to U.S.-Russia cooperation in the field of non-proliferation. Some senior, seasoned observers believe that the world is on the verge of a new wave of nuclear proliferation – indeed that it is imminent. One can see this concern expressed in the Shultz et al *Wall Street Journal* articles. I myself believe that the NPT regime is

much weaker than it was 15 years because of a number of factors including the India-Pakistan nuclear tests, the failure of the U.S. to ratify CTBT, the Iranian program, the DPRK program, etc. If this is true, I very strongly believe that the situation cannot be turned around without close U.S.-Russian cooperation. Failing that it will not be possible.

Indeed this has been true since the 1960s. For most of this period Russia has been a good partner although there have been rough patches. We seem to be in one such patch now, among other things because of missile defense, Iran and Syria. But we must not forget that the U.S. and Russia between them possess over 90% percent of existing nuclear weapons and we need to try to work things out so that we can work together on non-proliferation. Iran is a difficult issue for Russia, it is a nearby state, there are important trade relationships, Iran has never supported the rebels in Chechnya and elsewhere, and Iran has helped Russia in places like Tajikistan, but Russia has cooperated to a degree on Iran policy. Syria looks right now more difficult as there does not, at this point, appear to be a solution. But it is of very great importance, if at all possible, to restore historic U.S.-Russia cooperation so, among other things, we can hold the line on proliferation and do more on nuclear weapon arms control in our mutual security interest.

Tom

**FROM:** Christopher Ford

**TO:** Thomas Graham

**SUBJECT:** *My Thoughts on CTBT, New START, Tactical Nukes, and China*

Dear Tom,

It is indeed remarkable the degree to which the “everything will be better if ...” arguments of the disarmament community always circle back around to U.S. ratification of the CTBT. Because by the treaty’s own terms, CTBT entry into force (EIF) would require ratification not just by the United States but also by North Korea, Iran, India, Pakistan, Israel, and China, it seems exceedingly unlikely that EIF will ever occur. The disarmament politics of the CTBT, therefore, are clearly much more about achieving American ratification than about actually obtaining a legally-binding test ban. Treaty proponents focus upon the supposed imperative of getting Washington to ratify, while the fundamental legal question of EIF is either ignored entirely or airily dismissed with a kind of “magical thinking” that posits that all those other countries will find themselves helpless to resist the pro-CTBT peer pressure if only America comes aboard. (How we Americans flatter ourselves!)

This is one of the things that I suspect rubs U.S. hawks entirely the wrong way, and not without reason. They perceive the international CTBT campaign as being, fundamentally, not about banning nuclear weapons tests at all, but rather about constraining the United States. The U.S. Government has adopted a pretty strict no-yield definition of what it means not to test, and we would probably hold ourselves to this after ratification even were EIF postponed indefinitely. Not everyone else would likely be so scrupulous, however – and indeed, if you believe the comments made in the Strategic Posture Review Commission Report, Russia and China may already be

doing secret low-yield testing, entirely undetected by the CTBTO, as part of their ongoing nuclear weapons development work. (Russian officials have also repeatedly made references in the press to their development of new designs.)

As far as is known in the open literature, moreover, other nuclear weapons powers have adopted weapons design and manufacture strategies that are better suited to a no-testing environment than are our own. During the Cold War, we built our approach around freely-available testing, and opted for enormously sophisticated designs never intended to *sit around on the shelf* indefinitely, coupled with a weapons-maintenance philosophy that stressed achieving reliability by continuously monitoring and repairing existing weapons as they age. By contrast, rather than trying to keep old warheads in service forever, the Russians apparently prefer to *remanufacture* their weapons on an ongoing basis – which pretty much avoids the ageing problem – and the often less elegant designs used by some other powers are probably better suited to *shelf-sitting* in the first place. (Just before ratifying CTBT, in fact, the French reportedly tested a kind of *dumbed-down* warhead design specifically intended to be more reliable in a no-test environment. I haven't heard any CTBT advocates suggest that the United States resume testing for such a purpose, but perhaps you can break new ground in support of the treaty, Tom, by making this case.)

As U.S. conservatives see it, therefore, the point of the CTBT campaign is to lock the Americans into a rigorous no-testing regime that would disproportionately disadvantage the United States. Hence their conclusion that ratification is foolish.

The anti-CTBT argument in the United States would have less force if (a) the U.S. laboratories were well-funded and thriving, (b) pro-CTBT activists were willing to countenance the development of new American warhead designs optimized for no-test reliability, (c) we shifted more to a *remanufacture* approach to weapon maintenance; and/or (d) we were willing to hold ourselves to a *most favored nation* definition of the test ban pursuant to which we would limit ourselves to doing only the sort of testing that we believe others are undertaking. None of these things, however, is currently true.

But enough of my harping on about CTBT, for I'd imagine the readers are probably tiring of U.S. by now. Before we wrap up this exchange, however, let me put some final queries to you – and, of course, offer my own thoughts.

To begin with, I'd like to sound you out about the so-called *New START* agreement. Whom do you think came out of those negotiations in a more beneficial position, Russia or the United States? (I'll admit it's not really a fair question, because the real secret of the *New START* agreement is probably that it didn't do too much of anything in the first place.)

For my part, I'd say that, on the whole, Moscow came out somewhat better off than Washington.

To be sure, President Obama achieved his objective of at least being able to say he'd gotten some new strategic agreement with the Russians, and the American team also negotiated verification and transparency rules that aren't so bad. (Indeed, they're surely the best part of this very modest treaty. Under current conditions, I think

transparency and confidence building measures are very much more important than numerical constraints.) The Russians like to say that the New START counting rules and the United States' stock of non-deployed weaponry favors America by permitting rapid bomber uploads, but there's precious little likelihood of U.S. gamesmanship there – especially under the Obama Administration – and the Russians have potential reload advantages in their unique arsenal of land-based mobile missiles, so I'd reckon that area may be a wash.

On the Russian side, Moscow also gained politically from getting a treaty, since in the post-Cold War era the Russians have invested a lot in strategic agreements with the United States as the symbolic coinage of their continued status as a superpower – a status that Russia no longer deserves in any sense apart from the nuclear weapons business. On top of this, Moscow managed to get the Americans to agree to some language in the Preamble that marks a new round in the unpleasant slow-motion Russo-American squabble over missile defense issues, and which lays the basis for future Russian threats to withdraw from New START over such matters. The Russians also roped U.S. *prompt global strike* planning into the agreement, by obtaining provisions that force the Americans into one-for-one tradeoffs between nuclear-armed ballistic missiles and any that are diverted for service with conventional warheads. (Alternative prompt global strike technologies are still many years away.) Additionally, the treaty's basic force limits, although notionally reciprocal, favor Moscow – as can be seen by fact that the Russians have been building up to New START limits while the Americans have to make cuts, though not big ones, to reach compliance.

For anyone who wanted or expected anything really significant to happen in the negotiations, New START is presumably a pretty disappointing treaty, but I'd score Moscow at least slightly ahead on points.

What little remains of the American non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) deployment in Europe probably doesn't threaten Russia enough to be tradable for any meaningful reductions in Moscow's enormous NSNW holdings – especially since I'd imagine that the Russian NSNW stockpile is kept on hand as much, or more, with China in mind as with NATO. (After all, it takes real paranoia to see the idea of a NATO invasion of Russia as anything except absurd, whereas the idea of Sino-Russian problems developing is not nearly so fanciful as a vastly populous, resource-thirsty, and increasingly powerful China rubs up against Russia's resource-rich but ill-defended and all but empty Siberia. Through this prism, at least, it's not entirely crazy for Russia to retain a sizeable NSNW stockpile.)

Given the degree that Russian belligerence vis-à-vis Georgia and periodic quasi-nuclear threats against Eastern members of NATO have justifiably spooked some Eastern European leaders, moreover, a U.S. withdrawal of NSNW from NATO might do real damage to the alliance. The utility of the U.S. deployments, one must admit, is more political than military, but this doesn't necessarily make them any less important.

On the whole, I'm skeptical about the odds of Russo-American agreement on NSNW – though based upon declarations made by the U.S. Senate and by President Obama himself, a NSNW deal would seem to be a *sine qua non* for any follow-on strategic

treaty. (Nor would mere reciprocal “redeployment” out of theater probably be considered adequate. To many American observers, that would seem little more than a disadvantageous game: once removed, our weapons would be all but impossible to return to Europe, whereas Russian redeployment could easily be done on demand by moving weapons around within the country, perhaps even secretly.) Don’t hold your breath for a solution.

I’m not too disconsolate about the improbability of resolving the NSNW problem, however, because I think the future of strategic “arms control” lies elsewhere. And this brings me to a big final question: What do you think China’s role is in nuclear disarmament?

From my perspective, as the only NPT nuclear weapons state that continues to build up its nuclear forces, China’s nuclear policy has vast implications for the future of arms control and disarmament. As I’ve been saying for some time now, uncertainty about Beijing’s trajectory in this regard is emerging – quite appropriately, in my view – as a “brake” upon what the United States and Russia should be willing to consider in their own negotiations. This is one reason why I think that it’s far more important, as a “next step” for strategic arms control, to work harder to engage Beijing on transparency and confidence-building measures (T/CBMs) than simply to undertake a sort of “try again harder” policy vis-à-vis negotiations with Russia.

To be sure, reducing uncertainty about Chinese intentions and long-term strategic planning may not necessarily solve the problem. (That depends, after all, on what China is really up to. One possible reason for China to cling to its current opacity is that more clarity about Beijing’s intentions might make the situation seem more alarming, not less!) If Beijing is right that we have nothing to fear from its strategic policy, however, there is everything to gain from transparency – and little to lose, since Chinese authorities are simply wrong to suggest that all the Americans want from transparency is better targeting information for a first strike. T/CBMs don’t have to create vulnerabilities, and they can do much to allay concerns and increase stability, including by improving crisis stability (which Chinese officials say they very much want to do). Openness will not magically resolve all Sino-American strategic tensions, but secrecy in nuclear relationships tends to breed arms races, and this may increasingly become a danger.

One concern that I have heard expressed in U.S. circles – and which one imagines has also occurred to Russian strategists – is what would happen if Washington and Moscow cut their forces to a level at which China would be well-positioned for some kind of sudden *sprint* to nuclear parity. (And Chinese officials indeed do talk about the possibility of some future parity. As several of them have expressed it to me, China won’t be much interested in strategic arms control negotiations until we come down to their level, but it would be nice to talk then. After all, nobody wants an arms race, right?) The Obama agenda of trying to continue Russo-American numerical reductions does seem inevitably to imply that at some point the global nuclear balance will shift from being primarily a deterrent dyad into a vastly more complicated and potentially unstable multi-player game. (This is one of the big theoretical problems of disarmament.) But it is not obvious to me why planners in Washington or Moscow would want to hasten that day’s arrival.

The future of strategic arms control probably depends upon how we handle these challenges.

All my best,  
Chris