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Table of Contents

1. The folly of arms control.....	1
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The folly of arms control

Author: Schell, Jonathan.

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Abstract: Ten years after the end of the Cold War, nuclear danger is rising. Despite the end of the struggle in whose name the great nuclear arsenals were built Washington now seeks to stop proliferation while holding on to its own arsenal indefinitely. But as nuclear restrictions falter - battered by India's and Pakistan's tests, Iraq's defiance, North Korea's missiles, and the US missile-defense plan - the absence of a middle ground becomes stark. Holding on to nuclear arms is not a deterrent but a proliferant that goads others to join the club. Arms control has become a way of avoiding a fateful choice: a world of uncontrolled proliferation or a world with no nuclear weapons at all.

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Full Text: WHY THERE IS NO NUCLEAR MIDDLE GROUND HISTORY OFTEN places before the world a problem whose solution lies outside the bounds of contemporary political acceptability. Such was the case, for example, in the 1930s, when the rise of Hitler posed a threat to the European democracies that they lacked the resolve to face. To check Nazi aggression, most historians now agree, the democracies would have had to oppose it early and resolutely, as Winston Churchill advocated. But Churchill's prescriptions were beyond the pale of mainstream political thinking at the time, and he was forced "into the wilderness," as he famously put it. Not until the late 1930s did his ideas win political acceptance, and by then the price of stopping Hitler was World War II. Vietnam offers another example. In retrospect, among the many outcomes under discussion at the time, only two were really possible. One was war without end-the open, unlimited occupation of Vietnam by American forces. The other was withdrawal and defeat. But the political costs of either-on the one hand, of frankly imposing American rule on that country for an indefinite period; on the other, of "losing" Vietnam-- were considered prohibitive. Deception and self deception abounded on all sides. Those who opposed the war counseled withdrawal, but usually without admitting that this meant defeat. Those who supported the war pretended that victory was near-that light was dawning at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Only temporizing, middling policies-first, surreptitious escalation, then "Vietnamization"-that postponed the hard choice were within political bounds. The price was paid by the people of Vietnam and the United States. A contrast is often drawn between idealistic and realistic policies. But the choices posed by Hitler's rise and the Vietnam War were different. They were between political realism-- bound hand and foot by a conventional wisdom out of touch with events-and the reality of those events, which we might call circumstantial reality. The nuclear predicament in the post-Cold War period presents the United States and the world with another choice of this kind. Once again, political reality and circumstantial reality what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once called the "pitiless crowbar of events"-are colliding. The real alternatives-the ones that can actually occur-are at present found politically unacceptable, while the politically acceptable choices are all unreal. These real alternatives are, on the one hand, the unrestricted proliferation of nuclear weapons-leading to what the late nuclear theorist Albert Wohlstetter some time ago called a "nuclear-armed crowd" and what Harvard's Graham Allison has more recently called "nuclear anarchy"and, on the other, the abolition of nuclear weapons by international agreement. The current American policy is to try to stop proliferation while simultaneously continuing to hold on to its own nuclear arsenal indefinitely. But these objectives are contradictory. The policy based on them is the equivalent-in the context of the nuclear dilemma as it exists at the opening of the twenty-first century-of appeasement in the 1930s and surreptitious escalation and Vietnamization in the late 1960s and early 1970s. To govern is to

choose. The current policy is a way of avoiding choice a policy without traction in the world as it really is. Meanwhile, as in the earlier dilemmas, both the danger and the cost of dealing with it mount. For in the absence of a decision, events are drifting toward one of the real possible outcomes, namely, uncontrolled proliferation. In politics as in physics, entropy is a recipe for anarchy. THE CRISIS OF ARMS CONTROL THE RISE in nuclear danger is already apparent in an across-the-board crisis that has developed in the last two or three years in the regime of nuclear arms control. The fabric of nuclear arms control is woven of four main strands, each the product of decades of negotiation. These were not conceived as parts of a grand design, but over time they came to possess a certain coherence. The first strand is the Moscow-Washington negotiations-first those that led to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), then those that have forged the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and II) to reduce the twin mountains of offensive nuclear weapons built up during the Cold War. The second strand, which is closely entwined with the first, is the attempt to rein in defensive antinuclear systems. Its centerpiece is the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972, in which the United States and the Soviet Union each agreed to field no more than one limited-range anti-nuclear missile system. Defensive limits are essential for offensive limits because a defensive buildup can upset any negotiated offensive balance. The third strand is the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), perhaps the most impressive and successful arms control treaty ever negotiated and the foundation stone of any hope for nuclear sanity in the post-Cold War world. Under its provisions, two classes of nations were created-nations without nuclear weapons that agreed to forego them, and nations that possessed them and were permitted, for a time, to go on possessing them. Today, 182 nations have ratified the NPT as non-nuclear powers, in return for which they have been given access to certain technology for nuclear energy, while five countries-the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France-belong to the NPT as nuclear powers. Four countries remain outside the treaty. Three-Israel, India, and Pakistan-have nuclear weapons, and one-Cuba-does not. The NPT does not, however, envision a permanent two-tier system of nuclear haves and have-nots. The nuclear powers are committed under the treaty's Article VI to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control." The fourth strand is the test ban negotiations-the grandfather of arms control measures, dating from the Eisenhower administration. Like the NPT, to which they are a crucial adjunct, the test ban talks are global. The Atmospheric Test Ban was signed and ratified in 1963. Its successor, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), would slow arms races since testing is considered necessary for many kinds of nuclear-arms innovations. Companion efforts are the negotiations to ban the production of fissionable materials, the negotiations to tighten restrictions on the spread of missile technology, and the calls to take nuclear weapons off of alert status. When the Cold War ended, the prospects for a steady strengthening of all four of these strands looked better than ever. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 promised a sharp decline in nuclear danger-the more so as no new global political struggle arose to take the Cold War's place. The mere relaxation of the struggle under Mikhail Gorbachev had given new impetus to START. In the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty signed in 1987, all intermediate-range missiles were banned from the European theater, and under the 1991 START I agreement, strategic warheads were to be reduced to about 7,000 on each side. The START II agreement, which would reduce strategic warheads to 3,000-5,500 on each side, was signed in 1993, and the outlook for early ratification by both sides appeared favorable. The number of countries that had signed the NPT was steadily rising. A positive synergy among the different negotiations seemed to be at work. Success in START and the CTBT promised to secure and strengthen the NPT bargain; a comprehensive test ban would help put a lid on proliferation; and an end to proliferation would encourage the nuclear powers to relinquish their arsenals. The convention banning biological weapons and the negotiations to found a convention banning chemical weapons (ratified by the Senate in 1998) suggested that the world was turning slowly but surely against weapons of mass destruction in general. Above all, the direction was right. Taken in their entirety, the world's nuclear arsenals seemed to be caught in a

tightening net of treaties and agreements that, if they did not end nuclear danger altogether, would certainly reduce it radically. Nuclear weapons began to look like a thing of the past, and they all but disappeared from public consciousness. Ten years later, nuclear danger is growing again, and the net of restrictions is rending. India conducted five tests in May 1998, and Pakistan responded with seven, producing the world's first nuclear confrontation entirely unrelated to the Cold War. In the summer of 1999, an official commission in India, borrowing a leaf from the American playbook of the 1960s, recommended the creation and deployment of a deterrent arsenal based on a triad of forces delivering nuclear bombs from air, land, and sea. North Korea has engaged in on-again, off-again efforts to build nuclear weapons and missiles for their delivery. Saddam Hussein of Iraq, who was forced after the 1991 Gulf War to endure the presence of U.N. weapons inspectors, has thrown them out. Earlier this year, the CIA reported that it was unable to assure Americans that Iran did not already have the wherewithal for building nuclear weapons. The weapons programs in North Korea, Iraq, and Iran have alarmed Congress, which now seeks to deploy an antinuclear national missile defense (NMD) as soon as technically feasible, placing the ABM treaty in jeopardy. The United States has asked Russia to amend the treaty to permit the deployment of NMD, but Russia has refused on the ground that NMD would destabilize the offensive nuclear arms balance. The threat to the ABM treaty in turn threatens START II, whose implementation has been conditioned by Russia on the ABM treaty's integrity. A deployment of antimissile defenses in Taiwan or Japan, which the Clinton administration has discussed with those countries, could lead China to build up its offensive arms. Even the United States' closest allies, the principal members of NATO, are alarmed by the unilateral character of the American decision to deploy defenses when ready. They fear not only that the missile deployment will revive arms races with Russia and China but that the United States, feeling safe behind its shield, will leave Europe to face the renewed danger alone. Meanwhile, Russia's doubtful control over its nuclear weapons and special nuclear materials (control to which the United States has contributed \$2.3 billion per year under the Nunn-Lugar legislation) increases the danger that not merely governments but terrorist groups may obtain and use one or more nuclear weapons. Finally, in 1999, the Senate voted down the CTBT. But the full extent of the jeopardy of arms control does not appear until the interrelationships between these reverses are considered. What if North Korea fires a ballistic missile over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean, as it did in 1998? Forthwith, the Senate votes to deploy NMD, even though it has not yet been shown to be technically feasible, and the administration announces that it will not be stopped from deployment by objections from Russia, which then draws back from implementing START II. These reverses, of course, place new stress on the NPT, whose indefinite renewal in 1995 and 2000 was explicitly conditioned on progress in nuclear disarmament and ratification of the CTBT. Meanwhile, Japan, also alarmed by the North Korean missile test, agrees to share in the expense of developing a missile-defense system, leading China to announce that if Japan (or Taiwan) should deploy such defenses, it might have to engage in an offensive buildup—something it may be in a better position to do thanks to its reported theft of American nuclear secrets pertaining to warhead miniaturization, which is a prerequisite for mounting several warheads on a single missile. That threat, of course, alarms India, which is at work on long-range missiles, and buttresses the American decision to build NMD—and so forth. In short, a single missile test by a small, poverty-stricken nation could touch off a string of consequences that places severe stress on almost every aspect of the global nuclear arms control regime. No longer does an act of nuclear escalation affect only a nearby adversary or two; its repercussions will be felt around the world. Any development of nuclear weapons or their delivery vehicles creates pressure to do likewise throughout what is now a seamless global web of actions and reactions. WHO'S NEXT? TEN YEARS after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the startling fact is that nuclear arms control is faring worse in the first days of the twenty-first century than it did in the last days of the Cold War. Then, nuclear danger seemed to be declining. Now, it is on the rise. Then, nuclear arms control agreements were progressing. Now, they are at a stalemate or in danger of unraveling. How has this come about? Why has the end of the global conflict in whose name the great nuclear arsenals were built proved worse for nuclear disarmament than the conflict itself?

Several adverse forces are at work. One is simply the ever-increasing availability of nuclear technology. By convention, the word "proliferation" refers to the actual acquisition of nuclear weapons. But there is also the proliferation of the scientific and technical capabilities on which the construction of nuclear arms is based. "Nuclear capacity" refers to a country's ability to produce nuclear weapons within a definite span of time. Sweden, for example, possesses such a nuclear capacity, though it has no will to build nuclear bombs. Libya, on the other hand, has the will but not the capacity. That this sort of unrealized capacity would proliferate far beyond the number of countries that actually possess nuclear arms was inherent in the nature of nuclear weapons themselves-which are based, of course, on scientific knowledge, which by nature tends to spread. In the early 1940s, for example, only one nation possessed unrealized capacity in this sense: the United States. That is to say, although it had not yet built a bomb, there was every reason to believe that its decision to do so would bear fruit. Today, many dozens of nations have such a capacity. The State Department puts their current number at 44 and, in negotiating the now-rejected CTBT, required that it not come into force until all 44 of them had ratified it. Nuclear technology is old technology. We are in the 55th year of the nuclear age. The secret of the bomb is out; it has been published in magazines. The same holds true for missile technology and chemical and biological weapons technology. If we think of the NPT as a dam holding back nuclear proliferation, then the spread of nuclear capacity is like water collecting behind the dam. That tide can only rise, increasing the pressure. The world's safety ultimately depends not on the number of nations that want to build nuclear weapons but cannot, but on the number that can but do not. If the spread of nuclear weapons is to be prevented over the long run, it cannot come through restrictions on nations' capacity. Instead, it must come by influencing their will, which entails the use of diplomatic and political means-- the very means whose breakdown we are now witnessing. A second new adverse element is the rise of antinuclear defensive technology. Antinuclear defenses have long been the wild card of nuclear policy, generating almost nonstop intellectual confusion and popular misunderstanding. Most people's visceral response to the idea of defenses in general is positive. The first duty of government is to preserve its citizens' lives, and defenses promise this. The doctrine of nuclear deterrence stood this commonsense appraisal on its head. Under that doctrine, safety depends on the absolute and unchallenged capacity of each side to annihilate the other's population-- a capacity that, when recognized by all, is meant to prevent nuclear war from breaking out in the first place. By eroding this vulnerability, defenses destabilize deterrence. Furthermore, they fuel offensive-arms buildups, since a nation whose offensive power is eroded by defenses is likely to try to restore it by building up its offenses. That was why the first achievement of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks was the treaty banning all but one antiballistic missile system on each side. However sound this reasoning may have been--at least as an adjunct to the deterrence doctrine--the general public probably never grasped it. That may be why President Reagan's proposal for a Strategic Defense Initiative in the 1980s, although technically infeasible, enjoyed such wide popular support. The collapse of the Soviet Union added fresh layers of confusion to this already bewildering situation. After the extraordinary expenditure of some \$60 billion since the early 1980s, a modest NMD program may now have drawn somewhat closer to technical realization. Its goal, though, is to defend the United States not against Russia but against the handful of missiles that might be fired by North Korea, Iran, or some other "rogue" state. Still, Russia has protested and threatened to suspend implementation of START II--for even if the defenses are feasible, neither Russia nor any other country except the United States has the funds or the technical means to build them anytime soon. Antinuclear defenses are not, like nuclear bombs, old technology; they are brand new (Indeed, they are so new that it is increasingly doubtful that they are feasible even for the United States in the near future; recent antimissile tests have proven embarrassing failures.) If, however, the United States does prove capable of building them, it will be in the position it was in with respect to nuclear weapons in 1943 or 1944--a potential monopoly position--and monopolies, almost by nature, destabilize military balances. More important than either the spread of nuclear capacity or the invention of antinuclear defenses is a third adverse element: the decision by the nuclear powers to retain their Cold War nuclear arsenals even in the absence of the Cold

War. If I carry a rifle on my shoulder during a war, it means one thing. If I continue to carry the rifle after the war has ended, it means something very different. When the Cold War ended, the United States merely continued with the policy of nuclear deterrence of the Soviet Union/Russia, accompanied by negotiated reductions. Yet this continuation—this doing nothing—constituted one of the most important decisions of the nuclear age. It quietly set a standard for the post Cold War period. The negotiated nuclear reductions have now approached the levels specified in START I, which was negotiated mostly with the now-defunct Soviet Union, and implementation of START II is uncertain. What is most important is that the United States, though paying occasional lip service to full nuclear disarmament, has insisted in its negotiations for a START III agreement on a lower limit of 2,500 nuclear weapons. Since no START IV has yet been discussed, the figure of 2,500 nuclear weapons represents the lowest negotiated level to which the United States has, so far, been willing to reduce its arsenal. At the same time, American officials have declared their intention to hold on to that arsenal indefinitely. In late January, for example, Russian negotiators proposed that START III require that the two sides reduce their arsenals to 1,500 nuclear weapons on each side. The United States refused, insisting on keeping a minimum of 2,500. The State Department's then-spokesperson, James Rubin, said, "We can limit the nuclear danger by going down to a level of 2,000 to 2,500 without jeopardizing our interest with respect to nuclear deterrence." In sum, as a matter of actual post-Cold War policy, the United States has consistently declared its intention to remain in a condition of mutual deterrence with Russia—to preserve the capacity of each side to annihilate the other. As Undersecretary of Defense Walter Slocombe explained, "A key conclusion of the administration's national security strategy is [that] the United States will retain strategic nuclear forces sufficient to deter any future hostile foreign leadership with access to strategic nuclear forces from action against our vital interests and to convince it that seeking nuclear advantage would be futile." Whatever one thought about nuclear arms during the Cold War, it did not necessarily follow that because Moscow and Washington had them, everyone else should, too. The double standard provisionally built into the NPT, although obviously inequitable, could be understood. Once the Soviet Union disappeared, however, the foundations of the argument shifted. The Cold War was a special circumstance irrefutably different from any other struggle on earth. Now it appears that the Western nuclear powers believed that no special circumstance was needed to justify nuclear arms. The United States was less threatened militarily than any other nation, but it insisted on retaining nuclear arsenals and switched its first-use policy from its old Cold War rival to what some policymakers called the "generic" target of merely potential dangers that might arise somewhere in the world. This shift in rationale has been accompanied by a shift in the arsenal's global influence. The American nuclear arsenal is often referred to simply as "our deterrent." But does anyone today seriously maintain that Russia has any thought whatsoever of launching a nuclear strike against the United States and is stopped only by a fear of U. S. retaliation? On the other hand, can anyone doubt that these arsenals, both Russian and American, are a significant goad to proliferation—that they serve, in the words of Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, as a "nuclear paradigm" emulated by other powers? IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, there is much more reason to call the American arsenal a "proliferant" than to call it a deterrent. This is not mere word juggling. A central lesson of deterrence theory is that the psychological effects of nuclear arms are as important as the physical ones. According to the theory, deterrence "works" when the leaderships on both sides of a nuclear standoff so deeply fear the other side's retaliation that they do not dare to strike in the first place. If the weapons are ever used, deterrence has by definition failed. What we may call "proliferance," too, is a psychological effect of nuclear weapons. Proliferance occurs when a country, fearful of a neighbor's nuclear arsenals (and in the age of the intercontinental ballistic missile, who is not, for these purposes, a neighbor?), builds one in response. The difference between deterrence and proliferation is that whereas deterrence stops nations that possess nuclear arsenals from using them, proliferation inspires nations that lack them to get them. In a sense, therefore, the two effects arrive at a common destination: the possession—but not, it is hoped, the use—of nuclear weapons. Any number of American politicians have stated that nuclear proliferation is the greatest threat to the security of the United States today.

In the post Cold War world, the effects of proliferation are much easier to demonstrate than those of deterrence. Proliferance led India-looking over the Himalayas to China, and beyond China to Russia and the United States-to turn itself into a nuclear power, and proliferation goaded Pakistan to promptly conduct its own nuclear tests. This influence acts both by example (the "nuclear paradigm" cited by Singh) and, even more powerfully, through the direct influence of the terror that is the chief product of nuclear arsenals. Indeed, the proliferant influence of nuclear terror has been in operation since the earliest days of the nuclear age. The clear lesson of history is that nuclear arsenals breed nuclear arsenals. Even the United States-the first nation to build the bomb-did so, in a sense, reactively. Franklin Roosevelt and his advisers were worried that Hitler would get the bomb first. (If there has ever been a good reason for building nuclear weapons, preventing Hitler from having a monopoly on them in the midst of a world war was it.) The Soviet Union then built the bomb in response to the United States; China built it in response to both the United States and Russia; India built it in response to China; and Pakistan built it in response to India. (The cases of the United Kingdom and France, which already enjoyed some protection from the U.S. nuclear umbrella, are less clear. Sheer national prestige appears to have been as important as any immediate security risks. Another murkier case is Israel, which, like the United States in 1945, built its arsenal preemptively but also sought to counter conventional threats from its Arab enemies and deter them from ever dreaming of overrunning it.) Every nuclear arsenal is linked to every other nuclear arsenal in the world by these powerful ties of terror and response. And when the list of nuclear powers grows, the country in question-Iraq? Iran? North Korea? Egypt? will probably have been inspired by the fear of some nuclear-armed foe. Deterrence is, in fact, the codification and institutionalization of this reactive cycle. Indeed, deterrence teaches that the way to avoid destruction by a rival is to possess nuclear weapons yourself. If this is not an invitation to proliferation, what would be? Whereas in the Cold War, deterrence was the dominant effect, now proliferation is. Consider the increasing danger of nuclear terrorism. The continued possession by many nations of nuclear arms makes the diversion of nuclear materials or weapons into the hands of terrorist groups more likely. But terrorists, having no nation to lose, cannot be "deterred" by the threat of retaliation. In their case, the proliferant effect of nuclear arsenals is all, the deterrent effect nil. Conversely, the only policy that can seriously hope to sharply reduce (although not entirely eliminate) the danger of nuclear terrorism is abolition, because abolition alone can impose comprehensive global prohibitions on nuclear-weapon technology.

THE EVOLUTION OF STRATEGY IN THIS SCENE of growing nuclear danger, no single actor, of course, is solely to blame. It is the essence of the new situation that the number of actors on the nuclear stage is growing. India, for example, bears a clear responsibility for nuclearizing South Asia with its May 1998 tests. But by signaling that the earth would remain nuclearized indefinitely even after the Cold War, Washington, Moscow, and Beijing also plainly incurred responsibility. If in the early 1990s the existing nuclear powers had committed themselves to the elimination of nuclear weapons and had by 1998 traveled some of the distance to that goal, it is hard to believe that South Asia would be engaged in a nuclear arms race today. If, however, we invert the question and, instead of asking who is to blame for the crisis of arms control, ask which country has the greatest power to tackle the crisis, our attention must turn to the United States. Whether the situation can be retrieved at all remains an open question. But without American leadership, any effort must fail. The question of why the United States plans to hold on to its nuclear arsenal indefinitely is, accordingly, highly important. The answer must be sought at many levels-the moral, the psychological, and the cultural, as well as the political and the military-yet because of the dominant influence of the strategists in preserving the continuity of policy as the Cold War ended, the importance of nuclear strategic doctrine cannot be overlooked. Four stages in the development of strategic thinking about nuclear abolition can be distinguished. In the first, American policy sought to head off a nuclear arms race by negotiating the abolition of nuclear weapons. In 1946, President Truman's representative for nuclear disarmament to the United Nations, Bernard Baruch, proposed that all nuclear weapons be eliminated and all nuclear technology placed under an international authority. In retrospect, the plan never had much chance. The Soviet Union was well into its own project to build the bomb (thanks in good measure to its

outstanding spying on the American effort), and Stalin, according to the historian David Holloway, had no wish to barter away the Soviet Union's capacity to build a bomb before it had even tested one. Former National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy was probably right when, after examining the abolition proposals of that time, he concluded, "The bitter truth is ... that what we have just reviewed was not at any time a serious negotiation on either side." In the second stage of the evolution of nuclear policy-during the late 1950s and the early 1960s, after both powers had developed not only atomic bombs but hydrogen bombs as well-the earlier obstacles to full nuclear disarmament were, increasingly, publicly acknowledged as insurmountable. It was no longer enough, even politically, to make fine-sounding proposals for abolition that everyone knew must fail. So if nuclear disarmament was impossible, nuclear arsenals would have to be accepted for at least as long as the struggle with the Soviet Union lasted. The strategic form that that acceptance took was the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, with its teaching that the way to avoid nuclear war is to strike a nuclear balance. In this new nuclear dispensation, there was still a role for nuclear disarmament. Its goals, however, would be different from what they had been in the time of Baruch. Instead of aiming for abolition, negotiations would seek to "stabilize" the nuclear stalemate. Accepting the inevitability of nuclear possession, these negotiations sought to diminish the possibility of use in two ways. First, they would mutually restrict the development of "first-strike" forces, which otherwise might tempt one side or the other to launch a nuclear war. Second, they would place a numerical, mutually agreed-upon cap on offensive nuclear weapons. The negotiations based on these principles were called arms control, as distinct from nuclear disarmament. The shift was presented as a victory for realism, in which the surrender of the unachievable goal of abolition prepared the ground for the more modest and achievable goals of limiting and stabilizing the nuclear balance of terror. In practice, however, the modest goals proved almost as elusive as abolition had been. For one thing, the temptation to build first-strike forces regularly got the better of the hope for stability. Each side habitually saw itself as lagging behind. Cries of alarm and appeals to catch up-to close a "bomber gap," a "missile gap," a "throw-weight gap," a "window of vulnerability"-sounded through the halls of Congress as well as the hidden precincts of the Politburo. Nuclear terror, it turned out, was harder to control than theory had predicted. The hope for stability coexisted uneasily at best with the readiness for prompt mutual annihilation, and the very terror that was the mothers' milk of deterrence spawned nightmares that tended constantly to upset the whole arrangement. In the words of Yale's Paul Bracken, "Once the two sides understood the mechanism of deterrence, there would appear to have been little reason to keep piling up additional weapons. But that is exactly what happened: just as deterrence stabilized in the late 1960s, each side began a huge building program." Not until Gorbachev came to power did significant reductions occur. As the doctrine of deterrence became entrenched in official circles, attitudes toward nuclear disarmament underwent a subtle but deep transition. During the first two decades of the Cold War, the most intractable obstacles to abolition, in American eyes, stemmed from the totalitarian character of the Soviet Union, which both posed the global threat that justified nuclear arms and, owing to its extreme secretiveness, ruled out the kind of inspections essential to a reliable nuclear-disarmament agreement. Over time, however, the particular reference to the Soviet Union began to give way. Arguments based on the nature of the Soviet Union might be called the limited theory of the impossibility of nuclear disarmament. In the new explanation, which we might call the general theory of the impossibility of nuclear disarmament, it was not particular problems caused by Soviet totalitarianism that were cited but a set of difficulties seen as intrinsic to the nuclear dilemma, whatever regimes might be involved. Nations in general, the argument now ran, would be able to cheat on any abolition agreement; they would have good reason to cheat; they would cheat, and then they would use their sudden nuclear monopoly to bully the world. In this more generalized view, the very fact that nuclear weapons had been invented was reason enough to believe that they could not be eliminated as long as lambs declined to lie down with lions. For even if the nuclear hardware were destroyed, the know-how would remain in people's minds, and someone would build them again. These views were expressed, to give one prominent example, in the 1983 Harvard-sponsored book *Living with Nuclear Weapons*, which posed the question, "Why not abolish nuclear

weapons?" and answered simply, "Because we cannot," explaining that "mankind's nuclear innocence, once lost, cannot be regained." In these circumstances-now regarded as immutable-abolition was seen not so much as difficult to achieve but as actually undesirable. A world free of nuclear weapons was intrinsically a less-safe, less-stable place than a world armed with nuclear weapons. In the words of *Living with Nuclear Weapons*, "If the political pre-conditions of trust and consensus are missing, complete disarmament is inherently unstable. In a disarmed world, the first nation to acquire a few arms would be able to influence events to a much greater extent than it could in a heavily armed world. Nuclear weapons greatly magnify this effect." As this general theory of the impossibility of nuclear disarmament won official acceptance, a change in the valuation of nuclear weapons occurred. The deeper, less-qualified embrace of deterrence (and of the nuclear arsenals the doctrine justified) opened the way to the idea that nuclear weapons, instead of being a necessary evil, were a positive benefit to the world-not so much a problem as a solution. They provided, thanks to the policy of deterrence, the only imaginable solution to themselves: they prevented nuclear war. Moreover, they prevented even conventional war-no mean achievement, considering what two world wars had done to the globe in the twentieth century. There matters stood when the Cold War ended, opening a third stage in the development of American strategy. The policymakers might have reasoned as follows: We built up nuclear arsenals to contain the Soviet Union, whose secretive character stood in the way of nuclear disarmament, but now, with the Soviet Union gone, should we not consider the abolition of these weapons? If in 1946 the Soviet regime had been like the one in Moscow today, wouldn't Baruch's plan have had every chance of acceptance? Shouldn't something like it be possible today? Unfortunately, what prevailed in the conventional wisdom was not the limited theory of the impossibility of nuclear disarmament but the general theory, and this has dictated a very nearly opposite response to the one sketched above. Nuclear deterrence, the policymakers said, worked during the Cold War; abolition, owing to the intrinsic nature of the nuclear dilemma, remained impossible; therefore the sensible course was to hold on to nuclear arsenals (albeit at reduced levels, in recognition of the improved political climate). Such was the conclusion of the "bottom-up" review of nuclear policy carried out in the early 1990s by the Clinton administration, and it has never been challenged since. Instead of saying to themselves, "During the protracted emergency that was the Cold War, we made a calculated gamble with the survival of the human race in the name of its freedom and were lucky enough to have survived to tell the story," the policymakers in effect said, "During the Cold War, we perfected a confidence-inspiring system for the management of nuclear weapons that should serve as our model for any future contingency" If deterrence, road-tested during the great U.S.Soviet conflict, was a proven success, then why give it up now? Didn't "the long peace" of the Cold War demonstrate that the world was better off with nuclear weapons than without them? In Undersecretary of Defense Slocombe's words, "It is a remarkable fact that for almost half a century, the U.S. and its allies faced the U.S.S.R. and its coerced auxiliaries in the division over ideology, power, culture, and the very definition of man, the state, and the world, and did so armed to the greatest extent huge sacrifice would afford, and yet did not fight a large-scale war. No one can say for sure why that success was achieved for long enough for communism to collapse of its own internal weakness. But can anyone really doubt that nuclear weapons had a role?" Thus, at just the moment that a revolution in the international sphere seemed to call for a full-scale reappraisal of nuclear policy, the previous policy was reaffirmed with fewer reservations than ever before. Others embraced the positive role of nuclear weapons in even stronger terms. In the words of the nuclear theorist James May, "Nuclear weapons are not all that is needed to make war obsolete, but they have no real substitute." Because they "cheaply and predictably destroy whatever both sides are fighting for" and "destroy the battlefield as well as the enemy," they "are essential" for maintenance of global peace. American thinking had come full circle. Preventing war, of course, had been the great unrealized goal of both Woodrow Wilson's beloved League of Nations and the United Nations. The new view, which might be called nuclear Wilsonianism, was that nuclear weapons could accomplish what these ambitious global institutions had not the abolition of war (or, at least, of world war). Thus, in brief, did the United States, in the 46 years between Hiroshima and the end

of the Cold War, make the passage from abolitionism to its current profound and complacent belief in the virtue of nuclear arms. The post Cold War nuclear policies of the United States have been easy to misunderstand. Both President Bush and President Clinton have been given to claiming that nuclear danger is a thing of the past that, as Clinton has said, "for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, the children of [pick your state] are not at risk of nuclear war." Both presidents also were committed to the policy of gradual reductions. Clinton has continued to pay the lip service to abolition required by Article VI of the NPT, but as a matter of actual policy, the United States has remained committed to retaining arsenals of thousands of warheads indefinitely. In the early 1990s, the damaging consequences of this decision were hidden. The non-Russian republics that succeeded the Soviet Union were persuaded to surrender the nuclear weapons that had wound up on their soil, and South Africa's apartheid regime, anticipating majority rule, dismantled its nuclear-weapons program. France began a series of tests but curtailed them in the face of intense public condemnation. Not until the latter half of the decade did the damage become apparent. Under these conditions, the third stage of American strategic thinking--in which deterrence won previously unequalled support and policymakers sought to reconcile it with a policy of nonproliferation-- has begun to break apart, and a fourth stage has begun to loom. In this stage, the decision between possession justified by deterrence) and nonproliferation will have to be made. The fissures dividing the two courses are already deep and wide. They appeared, for instance, in the world's reaction to India's nuclear tests. The United States and a few other countries promptly announced sanctions. But their resolve was weak, the sanctions were soon badly eroded, and Clinton, the leader of the drive for sanctions, soon made the first state visit to India by an American president in nearly a quarter-century. The recent history of relations with Iraq tells the same story. The United States sought to prevent Iraq from acquiring nuclear weapons--first by requiring Iraq to accept U.N. weapons inspectors and then by the direct use of air strikes. Iraq remained defiant, and now the international community has no reliable instruments for the achievement of its goal. The lesson is clear: Countries that possess nuclear weapons and mean to keep them are in an inherently weak position when they face countries determined to develop these same arms. The possessor nations not only cannot control the debate; they can scarcely get into the conversation. NUCLEAR WILSONIANISM IN RESPONSE to the crisis of this fourth stage, some have frankly decided to resolve the contradiction in favor of proliferation. The political scientist Kenneth Waltz, for example, has argued in detail that it is a mistake to suppose that "new nuclear states will be less responsible and capable of self control than old ones have been." Hence, he writes, "the gradual spread of nuclear weapons is more to be welcomed than feared." A world "with more nuclear states" will have a more "promising future." And John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago has called for "managed proliferation" and would welcome acquisition of the bomb by Germany, Japan, and one or more eastern European countries. In the third stage of the development of nuclear strategy, deterrence was embraced, but only for a few major powers. Just as we can distinguish between a limited and a general theory of impossibility of nuclear disarmament, so we can distinguish between a limited nuclear Wilsonianism and a general nuclear Wilsonianism. The former school holds that nuclear weapons were a benefit--but only for ourselves and a few privileged friends and adversaries. The latter school, to which Waltz and Mearsheimer belong, holds that nuclear weapons are good for all who feel the need for them. A policy shift from limited nuclear Wilsonianism to general nuclear Wilsonianism would parallel the early shift from Baruch's policy of abolition to the policy of deterrence. Just as, in the earlier period, the American government, despairing of abolition, embraced the more modest goal of arms control, so now the government, in despair of repairing the broken policy of nonproliferation, would embrace global nuclearization. Giving up on a goal whose achievement it sees as impossible--nonproliferation--Washington would aim at the more modest but supposedly achievable goal of superintending a stable transition to a nuclearized world. At that point, the United States' embrace of nuclear weapons, having proceeded step by imperceptible step from 1946 down to the present, would have reached its logical destination. Living with nuclear weapons would then mean living with nuclear weapons on an equal basis with all other nations that wished to have them. This position has the merit, at least, of being

attainable. An international order "with more nuclear states" can certainly be achieved and is, in fact, the destination toward which the world is drifting. Doing nothing will be sufficient to bring it about. Those, however, who find the uncontrolled spread of nuclear weapons (together, almost certainly, with other weapons of mass destruction) terrifying and wish to persevere in the more active and difficult policy of nonproliferation will have to accept that it is fundamentally inconsistent with nuclear possession-and then embrace nuclear abolition. A policy that seeks to marry possession with nonproliferation lacks coherence-in the first place morally, but also militarily, diplomatically, and legally. It is a policy divided against itself. Its moving parts work against each other. Its deeds rise up to knock down its words. For the adverse factors that are breaking down nuclear arms control agreements form a vicious circle. Possession by the current nuclear powers breeds proliferation by new powers; proliferation by new powers breeds defenses in the old ones and undercuts the nuclear test ban; defenses upset the balance of nuclear terror and stalemate arms control; the stalemate of arms control confirms the nuclear powers in their possession of nuclear arsenals; confirmed possession breeds proliferation; and so on. There are, it is true, countervailing tendencies. In many parts of the world, a steady undertow of nuclear sanity has impeded and slowed what otherwise might already have been a global scramble to obtain nuclear arms. The entire continent of South America, for example, is, in accord with the treaty of Tlatelolco, free of nuclear weapons. Brazil and Argentina-two fully nuclear-capable nations that were the last to join that treaty-proceeded quite far down the path to nuclear armament before turning back. The Cold War and its nuclear balance of terror held no attraction as a model in their eyes. They saw greater safety in the continent-wide abolition of nuclear arms. Africa and the South Pacific have made the same decision. The norm in the family of nations is to be nuclear weapon free, not nuclear armed. Another broad tendency of the post-Cold War period-democratization-might seem to offer help in reducing nuclear danger. Over the long run, the benefits may appear, but the record so far does not, unfortunately, sustain these hopes. On the evidence, democracy offers no immunity to the nuclear temptation. The world's first nuclear power was, of course, a democracy. Today, six of the world's eight nuclear powers-the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, India, and Israel-are democracies. The democratization of Russia, as noted, did not inspire its democratic adversary, the United States, to seek to liquidate their balance of nuclear terror. In South Asia, democratic India led the way to the nuclearization of the subcontinent. Modest successes in one strand or another of nuclear arms control are still possible. Perhaps the Senate will reverse itself and pass the CTBT. Conceivably, Russia, yielding to financial need and U.S. pressure, will accept some modification of the ABM treaty and implement START II. Yet it is getting harder by the day to imagine, given the tight connections between possession and proliferation, that the deterioration and even collapse of the fabric of nuclear arms control can be stopped absent a commitment to abolition. The bare existence of the world's present nuclear arsenals poses the ever-present danger of unimaginable catastrophe. Amid the legitimate concern regarding proliferation, it is easy to forget that nuclear peril flows from the nations that possess nuclear weapons, not from those that don't. DANGER AND SURVIVAL BUT WOULD EVEN a commitment by the nuclear powers to abolition serve to stop proliferation? Or has the world, perhaps without realizing it, proceeded so far down the path of nuclearization that a reversal is impossible, as the nuclear Wilsonians argue? Even if the will were present, the practical obstacles would be immense. Basic security policies of half a century would have to undergo authentic "bottom-up" reviews in all the great powers. The conventional balances among them would have to be readjusted all over the world. There are few areas of actual or potential regional conflict for example, East Asia, the Middle East, South Asia-in which the consequences would not be profound. The technical and diplomatic arrangements necessary to undergird abolition would be even more complex than those surrounding current arms negotiations. The inspections regime alone would have to be a masterpiece of science, diplomacy, and statecraft. We must distinguish, however, between the achievement of the goal-destruction of the world's very last nuclear warhead-- and the commitment to the goal. To reverse proliferation and start immediately to radically reduce nuclear danger, the destruction of the last warhead is not necessary. But the commitment by the nuclear powers to do so is. Figures

of a,500 and 1,500 nuclear weapons are already on the Russian-American negotiating table. The stages below these figures should, after suitable study, be delineated. A moment should be identified at which the lesser nuclear powers would be expected to join in the negotiations and begin to draw down their own arsenals. Qualitative steps, beginning with taking nuclear arsenals off their states of alert, would be planned. The expectations that the nuclear powers-once thoroughly embarked on their historic course-had of other nations, including those otherwise inclined to proliferate, would be specified. For example, from the outset, a sort of global freeze might go into effect, under which all countries with nuclear weapons would commit themselves to a process leading to abolition, and countries without nuclear weapons would be required to persevere in their vow not to acquire them. Increasingly severe transparency, inspections, and provisions to control nuclear-weapon materials such as enriched uranium and plutonium could be negotiated promptly. The countries that had embarked on nuclear disarmament would agree on steps to take if proliferation was discovered. Only by imagining this scene of comprehensively transformed expectations does the power of a policy of committing the world to nuclear abolition emerge-not as a remote vision but as an active force from the moment the commitment is made. Great nuclear powers that had committed themselves to nuclear abolition and taken serious steps toward that goal would have a far different attitude toward proliferators than those who plan to depend indefinitely on nuclear weapons for their ultimate security. They would possess a degree of will to enforce nonproliferation that the U.N. Security Council quite lacks at present. Under the above new conditions, a non-nuclear nation seeking openly to build a nuclear arsenal would arouse the anger and retaliation of the world. Consider again the case of Iraq. Saddam Hussein's strategy has been to kick out the U.N. inspectors at his pleasure and then play one great power off against another-for instance, Russia and France against the United States and the United Kingdom-as they attempt to reintroduce controls. Such tactics would be at an end if all of these countries had made the commitment to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. Nuclear powers that had jointly agreed to abolish their arsenals and were in the midst of so doing would be planning to rely on that agreement for their security to the same extent that they now rely on their nuclear arsenals. Would they let Saddam have what they were renouncing? They would possess an implacable will, based on the most elemental national interest, to stop proliferation, and they would possess the wherewithal to do it-including, certainly, the resolve and means to defeat and overthrow the offending regime. Curiously, today, it is just because the nuclear powers rely for their security on their own nuclear arsenals that they lack the will to eliminate Saddam's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs. Is the argument circular? Does it say that countries would have the will to stop proliferation if only they had the will to stop proliferation? Not at all. Political will, where it exists, is a reality. The resolve to proceed to a world without nuclear weapons would be a dominant fact in the life of the world, from which dramatic consequences would flow long before abolition was achieved. How, though, can the commitment by the United States and the other nuclear powers be signaled, and why should nations that lack nuclear arsenals but think they might eventually need them believe that commitment? Every now and then, a U.S. official will say that the United States wishes to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Remarks of this kind scarcely assure the world that the destination is in sight. Nor, of course, should they. A policy is not a dream. A policy is a plan of action that you believe can happen and that you intend to make happen. A president who intends to commit the United States to a policy of negotiating the abolition of nuclear weapons would not announce the fact in answer to a question at a press conference or in the peroration to some speech on an unrelated subject. Abolition is not a goal at which the world will arrive (to paraphrase the old saying about Britain's acquisition of its empire) through a fit of absence of mind. (Only proliferation can be achieved through absent-mindedness.) For such a commitment to be real-credible, to adapt a key word from nuclear strategy-a number of things would have to happen. A president who meant to embark on this path would have to make abolition an issue in the election campaign to acquire a public mandate. Without this, the destination could not possibly be reached in a democracy. Upon being elected, the new president would choose, among others, secretaries of state and defense who publicly agreed with the abolition policy, and would battle to win their

confirmation in the Senate. The president would give a solemn address to the nation-the first of many on the subject announcing the initiative. This president would then launch an interagency review-or perhaps, first, a presidential commission-to study the feasibility and the precise features, in all their immense complexity, of a nuclear-weapon-- free world. The president would then consult with the United States' allies and approach the two next-greatest nuclear powers, Russia and China, and would, at the same time, seek bipartisan support, without which the initiative could never succeed and probably should not be launched. To paraphrase the old saying about revolution, nuclear abolition is not a tea party, and anything less than a full-scale effort backed by the nation as a whole would be stillborn. The path to a solution of the nuclear dilemma passes first through domestic politics. The public must give its permission and support. As it happens, the Senate's rejection of the cTBT and a furor over NMD have intruded the nuclear question into the current presidential race. Governor George W. Bush of Texas has taken the initiative with a bold if vague proposal. He has made the welcome statement that "our mutual security need no longer depend on a nuclear balance of terror." Today's large arsenals, he has said, "are the expensive relics of dead conflicts. And they do nothing to make us more secure." He would cut them to an unspecified "lowest possible number." At the same time, though, he would deploy missile defenses far more ambitious than even those favored by the Clinton administration. The problem with Bush's program is that his plans for reductions collide with his plans for missile defense. He will not be able to get to his low number if missile defenses stoke nuclear buildups in Russia and China. On the Democratic side, Vice President Al Gore supports the Clinton policies-that is, pursuing reductions, but not below the floor of 2,500 nuclear warheads on the U. S. side. The problems with the Gore approach are the problems with the Clinton policy; an indefinitely held arsenal of thousands of nuclear weapons is a recipe for proliferation. The way to make sense of both positions is the same: a commitment to abolition. If Bush's "lowest possible number" is zero for all nations, his defenses will no longer be destabilizing. Whether possessed by the United States alone or, as Reagan suggested, shared with Russia and other nations, missile defenses could help safeguard a world free of nuclear weapons against secret or open nuclear re-armament. If Gore embraces zero, he will have in his hand the basis for a program that can truly deal with what he calls the greatest threat to American security, nuclear proliferation. But even a president's intentions alone would not suffice. The nation would have to respond positively. A full-scale debate in the news media, universities, and civil society would have to ensue. Is safety to be found in nuclear arms or in their elimination? Can inspection of an abolition agreement be adequate? What should be the disposition of conventional forces-American and other? Would defense spending rise or fall? What should be done if a country violates the agreement? These and many other questions of similar importance have not been answered. They have not, in any national debate worthy of the name, even been asked. (AuthorAffiliation JONATHAN SCHELL is the author of *The Fate of the Earth*, *The Abolition*, and *The Gift of Time*. He is a former staff writer for *The New Yorker*.

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