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**A Vision of Global Security, and the Role of Nuclear Weapons  
in the Twenty-first Century  
by Robert S. McNamara**

I have been asked to speak for 30 minutes on my vision of global security and the role of nuclear weapons in the 21st century and then to take questions. I will be happy to do so. For me the question and answer period is often the most interesting part of the meeting and I suspect it may be for you as well.

I want to begin my remarks by telling you of my earliest memory as a child. It is of a city exploding with joy. The city was San Francisco. The date was November 11, 1918 -- Armistice Day. I was two years old. The city was celebrating not only the end of World War I, but the belief, held so strongly by President Wilson, and by many other Americans, that the United States and its allies had won the war to end all wars.

They were wrong, of course. The Twentieth Century was on its way to becoming the bloodiest, by far, in all of human history: during it, 160 million people will have been killed in conflicts across the globe.

So, my thesis, this afternoon is that we must not permit the 21st Century to repeat the slaughter of the 20th. The time to initiate action to prevent that tragedy is now. I believe three specific steps are required:

1. To reduce the risk of conflict within and among states we should establish a system of Collective Security.
2. The system of Collective Security should place particular emphasis on limiting the risk of war between or among Great Powers.

3. To eliminate the risk of destruction of nations, in the event Collective Security breaks down, we should return, insofar as practical, to a non-nuclear world.

First, my approach to Collective Security.

Although clear evidence has existed since the mid-1980s that the Cold War was ending, nations throughout the world have been very slow to revise their foreign and defense policies, in part because they do not see clearly what lies ahead.

As the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, and the turmoil in Northern Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi make clear, the world of the future will not be without conflict, conflict between disparate groups within nations and conflict extending across national borders. Racial, religious, and ethnic tensions will remain. Nationalism will be a powerful force across the globe. Political revolutions will erupt as societies advance. Historic disputes over political boundaries will endure. And economic disparities among nations will increase as technology and education spread unevenly around the world. The underlying causes of Third World conflict that existed long before the Cold War began remain now that it has ended. They will be compounded by potential strife among states of the former Soviet Union and by continuing tensions in the Middle East. It is just such tensions that in the past forty-five years have contributed to 125 wars causing 40 million deaths in the Third World.

So, in these respects, the world of the future will not be different from the world of the past -- conflicts within nations and conflicts among nations will not disappear. But relations between nations will change dramatically. In the post-war years, the United States had the power -- and to a considerable degree we

exercised that power -- to shape the world as we chose. In the next century, that will not be possible.

Japan is destined to play a larger and larger role on the world scene, exercising greater economic and political power and, one hopes, assuming greater economic and political responsibility. The same can be said of Western Europe, following its major step toward economic integration. Greater political unity is bound to follow (despite opposition to the Maastricht Treaty), and that will strengthen Europe's power in world politics.

And by the middle of the next century, several of the countries of what in the past we have termed the Third World will have grown so dramatically in population and economic power as to become major forces in international relations. India is likely to have a population of 1.6 billion; Nigeria, 400 million; Brazil, 300 million. And if China achieves its ambitious economic goals for the year 2000, and then maintains satisfactory but not spectacular growth rates for the next fifty years, its 1.6 billion people will have the income of Western Europeans in the 1960's. It will indeed be a power to be reckoned with: economically, politically and militarily. We in the US have not even begun to relate properly to the China of the 21st Century.

The figures I have cited are highly speculative, of course, but I point to them to emphasize the magnitude of the changes that lie ahead.

While remaining the world's strongest nation, the United States will live in a multipolar world, and its foreign policy and defense programs must be adjusted to this emerging reality. In such a world, need clearly exists for developing new relationships both among the Great Powers -- and between the Great Powers and other nations.

Many political theorists, in particular, those classified as "realists," predict a return to traditional power politics. They argue that the disappearance of ideological competition between East and West will trigger a reversion to traditional relationships based on territorial and economic imperatives: they say that the United States, Russia, Western Europe, China, Japan, and perhaps India will seek to assert themselves in their own regions while still competing for dominance in other areas of the world where conditions are fluid. This view has been expressed, for example, by Harvard Professor Michael Sandel. Sandel has written: "The end of the Cold War does not mean an end of global competition between the Superpowers. Once the ideological dimension fades, what you are left with is not peace and harmony, but old-fashioned global politics based on dominant powers competing for influence and pursuing their internal interests."

Henry Kissinger, also a member of the realist school, has expressed a similar conclusion.

Kissinger's and Sandel's conceptions of relations among nations in the post-Cold War world are, of course, historically well founded, but I would argue that they are inconsistent with our increasingly interdependent world. No nation, not even the United States, can stand alone in a world in which nations are inextricably entwined with one another economically, environmentally, and with regard to security. I believe, therefore, that for the future, the United Nations charter offers a far more appropriate framework for international relations than does the doctrine of power politics.

Above all else, as I suggested, emphasis should be placed on avoiding conflict among the Great Powers.

The two most important geo-political events of the past half-century were the reconciliation between France and Germany after centuries of enmity, and the establishment of peaceful relations between Japan and the US after one of the bloodiest and most ferocious conflicts in the modern era. It is inconceivable today that either Germany or Japan would engage in war with any of the Great Powers of the Western World. Can we not move to integrate both Russia and China into the family of nations in ways that make war between them and other Great Powers just as unlikely?

In December 1995, one of the brightest and most personable Japanese I have ever met -- Mr. Kenzaburo Ohe, the Nobel Laureate in literature, visited me during the Christmas holidays at my vacation home in Aspen, Colorado to record a conversation for Japanese television. I wish to repeat for you a few paragraphs of our conversation.

I said: "Mr. Ohe I am indebted to you for coming all the way from Tokyo to meet with me. that's a long, long, journey and I'm very, very grateful to you. I'm particularly grateful for your interest in discussing what, to me, is really the most important subject in the world today. How to prevent these terrible wars that both of our nations have suffered from.

"This century will go down as the bloodiest century in all of human history. I know it is your desire and my desire that the twenty-first century not be a repetition of that. The question is, what can your nation do and what can my nation do to prevent that? I hope that's what we can talk about."

Mr. Ohe replied: "Mr. McNamara, because Japan was deeply involved in the East Asian and Pacific strategies like the United States, I believe much of the

Cold War structure still remains in my country. Because of this, it is our task to make efforts for peaceful and hopeful 21st century efforts to seek a new way for mutual existence without shedding any blood, and seek the way to participate in this new global relationship.

"I think you are shrewdly aware of what Japan did during the Cold War days. Do you think Japanese can participate in forming a concept for the new mutual existence after the cold war and in realizing this concept?

I said: "That is, of course, a question that really the Japanese should answer. But let me give you my answer. It is more a hope than a belief. I hope that Japan will participate in developing the international order for the twenty-first century. And I hope that Japan's participation will assist in moving that order toward a world of peace.

"Now, I know Japan has a conflict of interests here. The Japanese do not wish in any way to see their country revert to its pre-World War II militarism. I admire the Japanese people for their wish to avoid militarism.

"On the other hand, I think that, if I may be personal, I think that Japan has carried that feeling too far in this post-cold War world, because Japan removed itself from global politics. It hasn't been a member of the Security Council. I think it should be. It hasn't played a major role in United Nations peacekeeping affairs. I think it should. It hasn't really played a role, for example, in pushing China, Russia, the US, France and Britain to give up nuclear weapons. I think it should. It hasn't played a role in ensuring that China and Russia, in particular, are integrated into the family of nations as closely as US and Japan and France and Germany.

"No member of our audience today would ever believe that the US and Japan would fight a war again. Nor would they believe that France and Germany would fight a war again. Japan must help the US work with China and Russia to ensure that we will never fight a war again.

So I hope Japan will play a much, much greater role in geopolitics in the twenty-first century than it has in the past half century."

I return now to my discussion of Collective Security.

Before nations can respond in an optimum manner to the end of the Cold War, they need a vision -- a conceptual framework -- of a world that would not be dominated by the East-West rivalry that shaped foreign and defense policies across the globe for more than forty years. In that new world, I believe security relationships among nations should be directed toward three goals: They should

1. Provide all states guarantees against external aggression -- frontiers should not be changed by force.
2. Codify the rights of minorities and ethnic groups within states -- the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, for instance -- and provide them a means to redress their grievances without resort to violence.
3. Establish a mechanism for resolving regional conflicts and conflicts within nations without unilateral action by the Great Powers.

In sum, I believe we should strive to create a world in which relations among nations would be based on the rule of law, a world in which national security would be supported by a system of collective security. The conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace-keeping functions necessary to accomplish these objectives would be performed by multilateral institutions, a reorganized and strengthened United Nations together with new and expanded regional organizations.

That is my vision of the post-Cold War world.

Such a vision is easier to articulate than to achieve. The goal is clear; but how to get there is not. And I have no magic formula, no simple road map to success. I do know that such a vision will not be achieved in a month, a year, or even a decade. It will be achieved, if at all, slowly and through small steps, by leaders of dedication and persistence. So I urge that we move now in that direction.

Fortunately, we have time to proceed step by step. The risk of large-scale military operations between or among Great Powers is probably less today than at any time since the end of World War II. Although, we cannot be certain they will never again take place, what we can do is to insure that if the system of Collective Security breaks down and war between Great Powers occurs, it will not be fought with nuclear weapons and, therefore, will not lead to total destruction of nations.

We in the US, you in Japan, and all other inhabitants of our globe continue to live with the risk of nuclear destruction. Today, the United State's war plans provide for contingent use of nuclear weapons just as they did when I was Secretary of Defense in the 1960s. But I do not believe that the average American or Japanese recognizes this fact. No doubt, he or she was surprised and pleased by the announcement by Presidents Bush and Yeltsin in June 1992 that they had agreed to reduce dramatically U.S. and Russian nuclear weapon stockpiles. Today, there are 40,000-50,000 nuclear warheads in the world, with a total destructive power more than 1 million times greater than that of the bomb that flattened Hiroshima. Assuming the reductions called for by the START 1 Treaty are achieved, the total weapons inventory will be reduced to approximately 20,000. Bush and Yeltsin agreed to further reductions that would leave the five declared nuclear powers (the United States, Russia, France, the United Kingdom and China) with a total of about 10,000 warheads in 2003. It was a highly desirable move, but even if the agreement is ratified by both the U.S. Senate and the Russian Parliament -- and that

is not at all certain -- the risk of destruction of societies across the globe, while somewhat reduced, will be far from eliminated. I doubt that a survivor -- if there was one -- could perceive much difference between a world in which 10,000 nuclear warheads had been exploded and one subject to attack by 40,000. So the question is can we not go further? Surely the answer must be yes.

The end of the Cold War, along with the growing understanding of the lack of utility of nuclear weapons and of the high risk associated with their continued existence, points to both the opportunity and the urgency with which the nuclear powers should reexamine their long-term nuclear force objectives. We should begin with a broad public debate over alternative nuclear strategies. I believe such a debate would support the conclusion that we should move back to a non-nuclear world.

In support of my position, I will make three points:

1. The experience of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 -- and, in particular, what has been learned about it recently -- makes clear that so long as we and other Great Powers possess large inventories of nuclear weapons, we will face the risk of their use and the destruction of our nation.
2. That risk is no longer -- if it ever was -- justifiable on military grounds.
3. In recent years, there has been a dramatic change in the thinking of leading Western security experts -- both military and civilian -- regarding the military utility of nuclear weapons. More and more of them -- although certainly not yet a majority -- are expressing views similar to those I have stated.

First, the Cuban Missile Crisis:

It is now widely recognized that the actions of the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the United States in October 1962 brought the three nations to the verge of war. But what was not known then, and is not widely understood today, was how close the

world came to the brink of nuclear disaster. Just six months ago, the Kennedy Library released heretofore highly classified tapes which provided new insight into the near catastrophe. Neither the Soviet Union, nor Cuba, nor the United States intended, by its actions, to create such risks.

You may recall that the crisis began when the Soviets moved nuclear missiles and bombers to Cuba -- secretly and with the clear intent to deceive -- in the summer and early fall of 1962. The missiles and bombers were to be targeted against cities along America's East Coast, putting 90 million people at risk. Photographs taken by a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft on Sunday, October 14, 1962 brought the deployments to President Kennedy's attention. He and his military and civilian security advisers believed that the Soviets' action posed a threat to the West. Kennedy therefore authorized a naval quarantine of Cuba to be effective Wednesday, October 24. Preparations also began for air strikes and an amphibious invasion. The contingency plans called for a "first-day" air attack of 1080 sorties, a huge attack. An invasion force totalling 180,000 troops was assembled in Southeastern US ports. The crisis came to a head on Saturday, October 27 and Sunday, October 28. Had Khrushchev not publicly announced on Sunday that he was removing the missiles, I believe that on Monday a majority of Kennedy's military and civilian advisers would have recommended launching the attacks.

To understand what caused the crisis -- and how to avoid similar ones in the future -- high-ranking Soviet, Cuban, and American participants in the decisions relating to it met in a series of conferences beginning in 1987 and extending over a period of five years. A meeting chaired by Fidel Castro in Havana, Cuba, in January 1992 was the fifth and last.

By the conclusion of the third meeting in Moscow in January 1989, it had become clear that the decisions of each of the three nations, before and during the

crisis, had been distorted by misinformation, miscalculation, and misjudgment. I shall cite only four of many examples:

Before Soviet missiles were introduced into Cuba in the summer of 1962, the Soviet Union and Cuba believed the United States intended to invade the island in order to overthrow Castro and remove his government. We had no such intention.

The United States believed the Soviets would never move nuclear warheads outside the Soviet Union-- they never had -- but in fact they did. In Moscow, in 1989, we learned that by October 1962, although the CIA at the time was reporting no nuclear weapons on the island, Soviet nuclear warheads had, indeed, been delivered to Cuba, and, as I have said, they were to be targeted on U.S. cities.

The Soviets believed that nuclear weapons could be introduced into Cuba secretly, without detection, and that the US would not respond when their presence was disclosed. There, too, they were in error.

and Finally, those who were prepared to urge President Kennedy to destroy the missiles by a US air attack which, in all likelihood, would have been followed by an amphibious invasion, were almost certainly mistaken in their belief that the Soviets would not respond militarily. At the time, the CIA reported 10,000 Soviet troops in Cuba. At the Moscow conference, participants learned there were in fact 43,000 Soviet troops on the island, along with 270,000 well-armed Cuban troops. Both forces, in the words of their commanders, were determined to "fight to the death." The Cuban officials estimated they would have suffered 100,000 casualties. The Soviets -- including long-time Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko and former Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin -- expressed utter disbelief that we would have thought that, in the face of such a catastrophic defeat, they would not have responded militarily somewhere in the world. Very probably, the result would have been uncontrollable escalation.

In 1962, during the crisis, some of us -- particularly President Kennedy and I -- believed the United States faced great danger. The Moscow meeting confirmed that judgment. But during the Havana conference, we learned that both of us -- and certainly others -- had seriously underestimated those dangers. While in Havana, we were told by the former Warsaw Pact Chief of Staff, General Anatoly Gribkov, that, in 1962, Soviet forces in Cuba possessed not only nuclear warheads for the intermediate-range missiles targeted on US cities, but nuclear bombs and

tactical nuclear warheads as well. The tactical warheads were to be used against US invasion forces. At the time, as I mentioned, the CIA was reporting no warheads on the island.

In November 1992 -- thirty years after the event -- we learned more. An article appeared in the Russian press which stated that, at the height of the Missile Crisis, Soviet forces on Cuba possessed a total of 162 nuclear warheads, including at least 90 tactical warheads. Moreover, it was reported that, on October 26, 1962 -- a moment of great tension -- warheads were moved from their storage sites to positions closer to their delivery vehicles in anticipation of a US invasion.<sup>1</sup> The next day, Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky received a cable from the Soviet commander in Cuba, informing him of this action. Malinovsky sent it to Khrushchev. Khrushchev returned it to Malinovsky with "Approved" scrawled across the document. Clearly, there was a high risk that, in the face of a US attack -- which, as I have said, many in the US government, military and civilian alike, were prepared to recommend to President Kennedy -- the Soviet forces in Cuba would have decided to use their nuclear weapons rather than lose them.

We need not speculate about what would have happened in that event. We can predict the results with certainty.

Although a US invasion force would not have been equipped with tactical nuclear warheads -- the President and I had specifically prohibited that -- no one should believe that had American troops been attacked with nuclear weapons, the US would have refrained from a nuclear response. And where would it have ended? In utter disaster, not only for the US, Cuba and the Soviet Union, but for nations across the world, including Japan, that would have been affected by the nuclear fall out.

The point I wish to emphasize is this: human beings are fallible. We all make mistakes. In our daily lives, mistakes are costly, but we try to learn from them. In

conventional war, they cost lives, sometimes thousands of lives. But if mistakes were to affect decisions relating to the use of nuclear forces, there would be no learning period. They would result in the destruction of nations. I believe, therefore, it can be predicted with confidence that the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons carries a very high risk of a potential catastrophe.

Is there a military justification for continuing to accept that risk? The answer is no.

The military utility of nuclear weapons is limited to deterring one's opponent from their use. Therefore, if our opponent has no nuclear weapons, there is no need for us to possess them.

Partly because of the increased understanding of how close we came to disaster during the Missile Crisis, but also because of a growing recognition of the lack of military utility of the weapons, there has been a revolutionary change in thinking about the role of nuclear forces. Much of this change has occurred in the past five years. Many military leaders are now prepared to go far beyond the Bush-Yeltsin agreement. Some go so far as to state, as I have, that the long-term objective should be a return, insofar as practical, to a non-nuclear world.

That is, however, a very controversial proposition. A majority of Western security experts -- both military and civilian -- continue to believe the threat of the use of nuclear weapons prevents war. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Adviser, has argued that a plan for eliminating nuclear weapons "is a plan for making the world safe for conventional warfare. I am therefore not enthusiastic about it." A report of an advisory committee, appointed by former Defense Secretary Richard Cheney and chaired by former Air Force Secretary Thomas Reed, made essentially the same point. Clearly the current Administration supports that position. However, even if one accepts that argument, it must be

recognized that the deterrent to conventional force aggression carries a very high long-term cost: the risk of a nuclear exchange.

It is that risk -- which to me is unacceptable -- that is leading prominent security experts to change their views. I doubt that the public is aware of these changes.

Today given the widely divergent views of security experts, but with the recognition by all that initiation of the use of nuclear weapons against a nuclear equipped opponent would lead to disaster -- should we not begin immediately to debate the merits of alternative long-term objectives for the five declared nuclear powers?

We could choose from three options:

1. A continuation of the present strategy of "extended deterrence," the strategy reconfirmed last year by the Clinton Administration.<sup>1</sup> This would mean limiting the US and Russia to approximately 3,500 strategic warheads each, the figure agreed upon by Presidents Bush and Yelstin.

or

2. A minimum deterrent force with the two major nuclear powers retaining no more than 1,000-2,000 warheads each.

or

3. As I strongly advocate, a return, by all five nuclear powers, insofar as practicable, to a non-nuclear world<sup>1</sup>

It was to contribute to that debate, that in late 1994 Prime Minister Keating of Australia appointed an international commission to develop proposals for "a program to achieve a world totally free of nuclear weapons." The Commission members included, among others: Michel Rocard, the former prime minister of

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<sup>1</sup> "Insofar as practicable" refers to the necessity of maintaining protection against "breakout" in the states which previously possessed nuclear weapons or acquisition of such weapons by rogue states or terrorists. The elimination of nuclear weapons could be accomplished in a series of steps.

France; Joseph Rotblat, the 1995 Nobel Laureate and one of the designers of the original nuclear bomb; Field Marshal Lord Carver, former Chief of the British Defense Staff; General Lee Butler, former commander of the US Strategic Air Command; and myself. The Commission's recommendations -- reported in what has become known as the Canberra Commission Report -- were unanimous. They were presented without any qualification or even the slightest note of dissent. They urged the five Declared Nuclear Powers -- China, Russia, Britain, France and the United States -- to state their unequivocal political commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons and that they accompany such a commitment by three immediate steps pointed toward fulfilling it:

1. The removal of all nuclear weapons from alert status.
2. The separation of all nuclear warheads from their launch vehicles.
3. A declaration of No First Use of nuclear weapons against nuclear states, and No Use against non-nuclear nations. The US has never been willing to make such a pledge.

On December 5 of last year, nineteen senior retired US military officers and 42 senior admirals and generals from other nations across the world joined in supporting the recommendation for complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Years will pass before these recommendations are fully implemented. But we are beginning to break out of the mindset that has guided the strategy of the nuclear powers for over four decades. More and more political and military leaders are coming to understand two fundamental truths: we can indeed "put the genie back in the bottle," and if we do not, there is substantial risk that the 21st Century will witness a nuclear holocaust.

In sum, then, with the end of the Cold War, if we act to establish a system of Collective Security, if we place particular emphasis on avoiding war among the Great Powers, and if we take steps to return to a non-nuclear world, the twenty-first

century, while certainly not a century of tranquillity, need not witness the killing, by war, of another 160 million people. Surely that must be not only our hope, not only our dream, but our steadfast objective. I know that some of you -- perhaps many of you -- may consider such a statement so naive, so simplistic, and so idealistic as to be quixotic. But as human beings, citizens of a great nation with the power to influence events in the world, can we be at peace with ourselves if we strive for less? I think not. I hope you will agree.