Lugar envisions U.S.-Russian front against terrorism and weapons proliferation

The following is the speech prepared by Sen. Dick Lugar for delivery Monday, May 27, 2002 at the Moscow Nuclear Threat Initiative Conference: “Reducing the Threats from Weapons of Mass Destruction and Building a Global Coalition Against Catastrophic Terrorism.”

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade the United States and the Russian Federation have accomplished something never before done in history. Former enemies, who squared off against each other for almost 50 years, laid aside a host of major disagreements and forged a new cooperative relationship aimed at the control and dismantlement of weapons of mass destruction.

This logical course of action was never a foregone conclusion. Many in both countries failed to realize the magnitude of the threat and were unable to grasp the opportunities presented by the end of hostilities. While the world rejoiced with the end of the Cold War and leaders in Washington and Moscow grappled with the new geostrategic landscape, the weapons of the Cold War continued to threaten peace and stability. One of the tremendous ironies of the post-Cold War world is that our countries may face a greater threat today than we did at the height of the Cold War.

The strategic environment during the Cold War was characterized by high-risk but low-probability of a ballistic missile exchange and the use of weapons of mass destruction between the superpowers. Today, however, the opposite is the case – we live in a lower-risk but higher-probability environment with respect to the use of weapons of mass destruction. Whereas previous strategic calculations assumed more or less rational actors, experiences with Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and others make an assumption of rationality less plausible today.

The possibility of armed conflict between the United States and Russia continues to dwindle, but that does not mean our countries have little to fear. The attacks of September 11 in New York and Washington could have taken place in Moscow or St. Petersburg and could have employed weapons of mass destruction instead of commercial airliners.

NEW ARMS CONTROL TREATY:

Three days ago Presidents Bush and Putin signed a new treaty to lower the number of deployed nuclear warheads to between 1,750 and 2,200. This treaty is an important step toward a safer world. The United States Senate and the Russian Duma must work swiftly to ratify this important milestone in the arms control process. We should strive to exchange the instruments of ratification prior to the Christmas and New Years holidays.
This agreement is an important achievement. Yet, a larger potential threat stems from terrorists and weapons of mass destruction, with Russia and the United States facing a common enemy. Having agreed to commence the liquidation of the Cold War’s nuclear legacy, we must now refocus our diplomatic momentum on today’s dangers: Osama bin Laden or other terrorists in possession of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.

**THE NUNN-LUGAR PROGRAM:**

The primary vehicle for U.S.-Russian cooperation in reducing weapons levels set by the new treaty and addressing the threat posed by proliferation will be the Nunn-Lugar program. At this conference, we celebrate that for the last ten years it has served as the primary cooperative response to the threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus are nuclear free today, because of Nunn-Lugar. The U.S. and Russia have made tremendous progress in the dismantlement of long-range bombers, strategic missile submarines, missiles, and silos; the securing of dangerous materials; and the employment for former weapons scientists in peaceful pursuits.

But Nunn-Lugar is more than just a dismantlement program. It has provided an operational basis for the expansion of cooperative relations between the new independent states and the United States. The last ten years have seen a series of high points and low points in the U.S.-Russian relationship. In some cases, these low points were made more difficult by the near cessation of diplomatic contact. Talks were broken off, trips were canceled, and the temperature of relations dropped precipitously. But through the ups and downs, there has been one constant: the Nunn-Lugar program. Even during the moments of greatest tension, neither side considered halting Nunn-Lugar. The program was too important to the security interests of both countries.

Today, I believe that Nunn-Lugar can achieve even more with respect to the U.S.-Russian relationship. We must preserve the current momentum in U.S.-Russian relations to finish the weapons dismantlement job started a decade ago. But we must think even bigger. I would propose that the Nunn-Lugar model can help build the foundation for an effective coalition that combats terrorism and secures weapons and materials of mass destruction around the world. Russia and the United States are the key players in establishing such a coalition. This cooperation can be grounded successfully in mutual self-interest. But it would be even stronger if it were grounded in mutual respect and trust.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES:**

The Nunn-Lugar record is a shining example of what is possible when our countries put aside the competitive and secretive policies of the Cold War and provide each other with honest testimony. But the lack of complete transparency and information on the former Soviet chemical and biological weapons arsenals remains an obstacle that could derail our progress. Some leaders in my country believe that the lack of information regarding former Soviet chemical weapons programs and the continued secrecy surrounding four former biological weapons facilities is reason to suspend our cooperative activities.

Each year our President is required by law to certify to Congress that Russia is “committed to the goals of arms control.” This year, the Administration requested a waiver to this condition, pointing out that unresolved concerns in the chemical and biological arenas make certification difficult. In the meantime, existing Nunn-Lugar activities and projects may continue, but no new projects can be started and no new contracts can be finalized.

I am hopeful Congress will grant this waiver to the President and permit the Administration to carry on with cooperative threat reduction efforts. Continued transfers of weapon technology to Iran is also disturbing and weakens support for an expanded and improved relationship. Achieving the potential of the U.S.-Russian relationship will require that we put the policies of the Cold War in the past. If Russia is forthcoming about the legacy of their Cold War chemical and biological weapons programs and if it halts contributions to Iran’s WMD efforts, there would be significant support to expand cooperation beyond non-
proliferation into enhanced economic relations, increased trade, environmental assistance, and greater investment.

**PROPOSALS FOR EXPANDED COOPERATION:**

There are a number of areas in which I would propose to expand our cooperative dismantlement and nonproliferation efforts.

**Non-Missile Submarine Dismantlement:** I have visited the shipyards of Severdovinsk and Murmansk on several occasions. Each time I am startled by the enormity of the task that lies before us in the area of submarine dismantlement. Nunn-Lugar is limited to dismantling strategic missile submarines. Current U.S. law does not permit the Pentagon to dismantle general purpose boats. I believe this is a mistake.

There are important non-proliferation and security benefits to the timely dismantlement of conventional submarines. Many carry cruise missiles which could prove valuable to rogue nation missile programs. Other submarines, such as the Alfa attack submarine, is powered by nuclear fuel enriched to very high levels which could pose serious proliferation risks if unsecured.

Many point out that the infrastructure in place to dismantle strategic submarines can be turned to general purpose boats when the first phase of work is complete. This is true, but I continue to study proposals to speed up this important effort. Most recently, I have considered the possibility of financing the dismantlement of general purpose submarines through the sales of reprocessed fuel taken from the submarines for use in nuclear reactors. Experts explain that proceeds from the fuel sales would in turn pay for continued submarine dismantlement. We should study such proposals closely to determine if they meet bilateral needs and requirements. Before progress can be made, however, we need to get precise information from our Russian friends regarding fuel enrichment levels in these submarines. This information must be forthcoming before we take the next step in the dismantlement of these systems.

**Debt-for-Nonproliferation Swaps:** When President Putin visited the U.S. he spoke of the increasing debt burden facing Russia. An improving Russian economy and rising oil prices may have alleviated the debt burden in the short term, but the potential for the re-emergence of debt problems is real.

My colleague, Senator Joseph Biden and I have offered legislation authorizing "debt for non-proliferation swaps" between Russia and the United States. In other words, the U.S. would forgive bilateral debt in return for Russian commitments of resources to dismantlement and nonproliferation goals. Such swaps would relieve some Russian financial pressures and address American security concerns. The U.S. is a relatively small holder of official Russian debt, so we must work with our G-7 allies to underwrite a much larger program that would include Germany, Italy, and France.

It is in the national interest of both Russia and its debt holders that additional investments be made in downsizing its weapons, safeguarding its sensitive materials, and locating socially useful careers for its weapons scientists. "Debt for non-proliferation swaps" would not be a panacea, but they could make a real difference. I would urge American and Russian leaders to consider such a tool to meet non-proliferation goals.

**Former Scientist Employment and WMD Facility Opportunities:** The United States implements a number of programs to employ former weapons scientists in peaceful work. Tens of thousands of Russian weapons scientists have been employed by these programs. Considerable success has been realized, but with a renewed commitment of resources and leadership, the U.S. can make dramatic progress in ensuring that scientists forego the temptation of being lured back into weapons work. We must give these scientists an opportunity to succeed. If desperation and bankruptcy become the norm, many will believe they have little choice but to leave Russia and renew their weapons careers.
As important as these programs are, we must understand that they are transition measures, not long-term solutions. They are vehicles to move scientists from weapons research to peaceful work, but the private sector must be the ultimate destination. Only when these scientists have long-term employment in peaceful and economically marketable pursuits, will we be able to scale back our efforts.

American, European, and G-8 corporations have much to gain by cooperating with government efforts. I have urged American companies to explore the possibility of investing in Russian laboratories. These facilities would be an excellent investment in hardware and production technology, as well as access to the finest minds in Russia. Considerable thought and planning should be given to overcoming Western corporate hesitancy, sometimes caused by an inhospitable Russian investment environment. The role of private investment is critical to a successful non-proliferation end-game.

**Tactical Nuclear Weapons:** We must also begin to consider moving beyond strategic systems into the tactical weapons arena. In many ways the threat posed by the proliferation of tactical nuclear systems is more serious than that posed by strategic weapons. Tactical warheads are more portable, usually deployed closer to potential flashpoints, and many are not secured at the same level as strategic systems.

We must establish transparency in this area so that both sides can have confidence concerning the quantity, status, storage, and security of the other nation’s weapons. It would be a great shame if our impressive record of success in the strategic arena was undercut by the vulnerability of tactical weapons.

**Fissile Material Security:** After eight years of close cooperation and considerable effort, only 40 percent of the facilities housing nuclear materials in Russia have received security improvements through U.S. assistance. Unfortunately, only half of these facilities have received complete security systems. The Department of Energy has estimated that if current rates are not accelerated, Russia’s material will not be completely secure until 2029. Twenty-seven years is too long to wait!

There are a number of steps that can be taken to speed this important effort. First Russia should continue to consolidate materials in fewer locations. Such consolidation will save money and time. But, if facilities housing nuclear weapons materials are vulnerable, we cannot wait until a convenient budgetary situation arrives to complete our work. We must commit ourselves to installing necessary security as quickly as possible.

**LUGAR DOCTRINE**

On September 11th, in a dramatic telephone call to President Bush, President Vladimir Putin was the first foreign leader to join a global coalition against terrorism. The phone call and the cooperation that has followed the Afghan campaign constitute the best reflection yet of a new phase of relations. But the two leaders now must declare together a new front in the war – one aimed at building a coalition against weapons of mass destruction terrorism. The goal of this coalition would be to creatively and aggressively safeguard nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and their component materials and technology so that they do not fall into the wrong hands.

The problem we face is not just terrorism. It is the nexus between terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. There is little doubt in my mind that Osama bin Laden and his operatives would have used weapons of mass destruction if they had possessed them. As horrible as the tragedy of September 11th was, the death and destruction was minimal compared to what could have been inflicted by a weapon of mass destruction.

Let me propose a fairly simple and clear definition of victory. Imagine two lists. The first lists those states that house terrorist cells, voluntarily or involuntarily. Our common goal must be to shrink that list nation by nation. The U.S. and Russia, along with other members of the coalition, should seek to root out each cell in a comprehensive manner for years to come and maintain a public record of success that the
world can observe and measure. But there is also a second list. It would contain all of the states that possess materials and/or weapons of mass destruction. We must demand that all such weapons and materials be made secure from proliferation, using the funds of that country and supplemented by international funds if required. Our campaign would not end until all nations on both lists complied with these standards.

Today, we lack even minimal international confidence about many weapons programs around the world. Unfortunately, outside the former Soviet Union, Nunn-Lugar-style cooperative threat reduction programs aimed at these threats do not exist. They must now be created on a global scale.

NUNN-LUGAR EXPANSION:

Nunn-Lugar has demonstrated that extraordinary international relationships are possible to improve controls over weapons of mass destruction. Programs similar to the Nunn-Lugar program should be established in each of the countries that wishes to work with the United States, Russia, and our allies.

In the Senate, I have introduced legislation to permit the Secretary of Defense to use Nunn-Lugar expertise and resources to address proliferation threats around the world. The precise replication of the Nunn-Lugar program will not be possible everywhere, but the experience of Nunn-Lugar in Russia has demonstrated that the threat of weapons of mass destruction can lead to extraordinary outcomes based on mutual interest. No one would have predicted in the 1980s that American contractors would be working so closely with Russian friends eliminating mutual threats.

This type of cooperation could be just the beginning. Nations cooperating on securing instruments of mass destruction might also pledge to work cooperatively on measures to retrieve weapons or materials that are in danger of falling into the wrong hands and to come to the aid of any victim of nuclear, chemical, or biological terrorism.

By proposing that the next phase of the war on terrorism focus on weapons of mass destruction, and by forming a coalition to combat it, Presidents Bush and Putin would be addressing arguably the most important problem in international security today. Such a coalition could provide both Presidents with a focus for the qualitatively new post-Cold War relationship they have propounded but to which they have yet to give major content. It would be a fitting replacement for the old-style bilateral arms control regimes whose era is drawing to an end.

CONCLUSION:

There need be no limit to the strength of the U.S.-Russian relationship. Together we could forge the most far-reaching and effective alliance for peace the world has ever witnessed. But there are hurdles that must be cleared before our countries can achieve such an outcome. The first must be complete disclosure of past weapons programs and cessation of illicit trade with Iran. These items are the key to the future.

I intend to work closely with the Bush Administration as well as with friends and colleagues in Russia to determine how funding can be increased to accelerate non-proliferation efforts. The United States and Russia have a challenging but very promising road ahead, one that will require compromise and sacrifice. The last ten years have shown that nothing is impossible.

The next ten years must show how Russia and the United States subdued terrorism and led our countries and all who joined with us to security and an enriched quality of life. That is the promise of this conference in Moscow. And that is the reason we must share wisdom and strength with each other.

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